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ON THE EARTHQUAKE LINE



# ON THE EARTHQUAKE LINE

MINOR ADVENTURES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

BY

## MORLEY ROBERTS

WITH SIX PAINTINGS BY THE AUTHOR



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**Inscribed to**

**A. H. STOCKLEY**

**Sin mi estimado amigo no habria  
habido ni viaje ni libro.**



## Prefatory Note

AS I have put at the end what was first meant as a preface I have nothing to add here but the heartiest thanks for all who helped me on the journey. Among these I must mention more particularly the Editor of *The Morning Post*, whose use of articles written in Central America encouraged me to work on far more material than any newspaper can possibly have room for.



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# On the Earthquake Line



## CHAPTER I

### HONDURAS VIA ST. MORITZ

St. Moritz. Dr. José Gasteazoro. Tela, Honduras, the first time. Tela once more. Seamen and the land. The United Fruit Company. Bananas. The Guest-house. The Hospital. A Norther. Finance and peaceful penetration. Central America and the U.S.A. At Progreso. Corruption and politics. Unrest at Tela. An incipient revolution. We leave for Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.

IN the first decade of this century a doctor, enraged at my want of progress and his own want of success, followed the usual custom and despatched me to St. Moritz to recover or die as occurred to me. When I settled in a cosmopolitan caravansery there was "a man with a cough" in the next room. Perhaps foreseeing that he was going to get perfectly well he seemed to bear his ills with a cheerfulness that I envied, and somehow or other we made each other's acquaintance. As he happened to be a doctor I was possibly interesting to him from a pathological point of view. My interest in him, which daily increased, was based on the fact that he was a type new to me. By long descent a Basque, he was a Central American by four generations, and in every way a citizen of the world. He seemed

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to speak all European tongues with a decent literary history, and was as well acquainted with Paris and Vienna as Sam Weller was with the opportunities of London. Men took to him readily though he cared nothing for sport or sports, and women found him charming in spite of the fact that he found other women attractive. As for myself, I succumbed not so much to these outward qualities as to his inexhaustible kindness to me when a new undiagnosed complaint kept me in bed. Don José del Carmen Gasteazoro, doctor of medicine, eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, cosmopolitan and companion to all the world, behaved to me as if I were his brother. He came and sat with me, told me tales of wild revolutions, drew me lightning sketches of politicians who should have been hanged and met fairer deaths by the machete or a bomb, gave me hints of how to deal with women, individually or in the mass, discussed medicine, described operations, brought me books, went to the chemist, and even carried dangerous charity so far as to bring up ladies who sat by my bed and, beginning by pitying my forlorn state, went on to pity themselves and to relate the story of their lives. I ended at last by calling my new friend "The Angel of St. Moritz," and we swore eternal friendship as he invited me to come to Central America.

Life in the upper snows has its charms, but snow melts, things draw to an end, and I had to go

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back to England. I was not well, but at least fifteen years younger. I put this down to the keen climate of the place and the sunshine of my new friend. We parted, if not with tears, at least with mutual regret, and wrote to each other several times. But life is a perpetual struggle, and in the din and trampling of its dusty arena friends get parted. Gasteazoro hung for a while on the horizon and then set. Much happened to me in England, and Central America set with him. I should never see San Salvador, never sit on his volcano of Cosigüina, never hear the thunder of his cattle on his big Nicaraguan ranch, and never learn how a practising doctor combined his profession with the duties of an inherited cattle-farm. In ten years and more Gasteazoro, as it were, died to me. If he recalled St. Moritz I too must be a ghost. And then at last in the spring of 1923 I went out to Spanish Honduras, and after a stay there of a length which reminded me of a comic title, "Five Minutes in China," our ship turned her stem towards England.

In Tela some passengers had come on board. One of them sat by me in the ship's smoking-room, and, having learnt my name, suddenly remarked : " You know Gasteazoro."

I replied : " Yes, but how do you know that ? "

" You gave him one of your books with your name written in it."

My new acquaintance was an Englishman, manager

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of a bank in Guatemala City, who had been for years in San Salvador. Gasteazoro was there and as lively as ever. He had at last married, and now possessed four children. But the chief thing was that he remembered me, and here I was on my way back to England without having seen him. I asked Frederick Sawyer a thousand questions and wrote at once to San Salvador, posting the letter at Kingston, Jamaica. I made up my mind that if I ever got inside the Caribbean Sea again I would reach San Salvador if I had to walk there. Life was still in me, and sunken memories of St. Moritz rose to the surface. To remember was to be grateful, and all the more was I grateful because Don José never thought for a moment of being kind and thoughtful. He couldn't help it. He had, I am glad to say, no sense of duty, and Wordsworth was unknown to him. It is hard to imagine Central Americans breaking their own hearts and everyone else's by doing their duty. Huck Finn dismissed his conscience as a "yaller dog." In Central America there are many yellow dogs, but "consciences" have to be imported with parsons, and usually die of the climate. To be kind without thinking of duty is to be what Gasteazoro was. He often prescribed for the poor without a fee, and sometimes gave them money to get the medicine.

On December 18th, 1923, I sailed once more in the s.s. *Changuinola* for Tela, and for company

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had with me my step-daughter, N. I knew the captain, the doctor was an old friend of mine, the ship was fast, the weather good, and we came alongside the wharf at Tela on the day appointed. The skipper, the doctor and the three mates had taken N. aside, and, after expressing their surprise that anyone living in moderate comfort in London should leave that Lotus-land, had warned her that travelling in these republics was most awfully dangerous. Why not persuade me to return in the ship and give up a desperate undertaking? It was obvious I was never well, and in a land where small-pox, malaria, yellow fever, revolution and assassination were endemic, how could we survive? It was, however, N.'s first big journey. She has a passion for seeing the world and a nerve which enables her to stand on a ledge nine inches wide with the pavement a hundred feet beneath her. She recommended her advisers sardonically to try their hands on me. I had told her before this that seamen often have as much dread of the land as any old woman has of the sea. They come in contact with the riff-raff of ports, and assume that all they do not know are worse than those they have to deal with. She was also aware that if I had made up my mind to get to the North Pole I should certainly go far enough to be frozen to death. They did not argue with me. All they did was to bid us adieu very sorrowfully. Their depression was a tribute to our popularity,

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but I think we should have preferred something a little less like an eternal farewell.

Tela, in Honduras, is a new fruit port. A mighty company in America, with subsidiary ancillary companies in England and elsewhere, has planted with bananas the whole Central American coast from Puerto Barrios in Guatemala to Santa Marta in far southern Columbia. The banana has a story. It is an immigrant into the Americas from the East, and came by way of the Canary Islands. One plant thrived in Haiti, and now the whole Atlantic Caribbean coast, and far south, is full of them. A heavy norther, to say nothing of a hurricane, may blow out a million plants. The Americans and English eat them and think they grow in bunches on a tree, whereas for each "bunch" a plant dies. Elsewhere I shall speak of the methods of their growth. It is sufficient now to say that when we went ashore we became the guests of the United Fruit Company, which saved us from the "Hotel." A Spanish *fonda* anywhere has its drawbacks, and some of those in Central America are worse than impossible. We went along an asphalted pavement under a grove of cocoa-nuts, with the Caribbean lapping white sand in the sun-glare, and came to our "screened" house, one among many in the west end of Tela, where all the great people live away from the east end across Tela River, given up largely to the mixed riff-raff of a working population, a

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great number being negroes who are far from popular with the natives. There, too, is the Aduana or Custom House, and many republican officials haunt its precincts, considering whether they can by graft or cunning make enough to keep them when the next revolution destroys their sources of profit. That part of Tela east of the river was to be a few months later the scene of a Central American tragi-comedy, for when we came ashore we could hear already the rumblings of a threatened revolution. The Customs men searched my luggage for "guns." They did not, however, search me.

In countries like Honduras the guest-house is a great institution. It is used by travelling officials and all accredited strangers. It offers a refuge to many who might otherwise be homeless or have to camp. The Fruit Company is a kindly host ; it does its best, and hard would those be who speak ill of it. We found inside the screened verandah spacious parqueted rooms. Every room, or nearly every room, built by Americans in the tropics has its own shower-bath. Everything was spotlessly clean and as bright as the teeth of a black Dinah from Panama who waited on us. The wife of one of the Fruit Company's officials was in charge. She was a happy American and kindly. She regretted the cockroaches. Those who would avoid cockroaches must avoid these countries. They are swift

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and elusive and afford good hunting with a slipper. They should, with care, never be found in soup, but when we dined at the Company's "hotel," at which all employees of whatever rank, white-coated or shirt-sleeved, dined with us, I did find a wing of one in mine. N. was for a moment horrified, but I remarked with the dignity of an experienced traveller: "It reminds me of old times." Once in the Astor House in New York I found one in my bed. In the morning I said to the clerk, "I do not object to cockroaches in their proper place, which I take to be pie or hash, but I don't like them in my bed. May I have another room?" I got it, for this is the way to approach the American in authority. Mere resentment induces rudeness. I did great hunting in the guest-house.

We had to wait a week for a steamer to Barrios. Tela is not a good waiting-room. There is little to do but eat or sit upon the beach and be tortured by sand-flies. Luckily I had made the acquaintance of Dr. Nutter, the chief surgeon at the near hospital and now made friends with the physician. Wherever the Company goes it builds hospitals which are models. Colonel Gorgas cleaned up Panama and made it a health resort, and all other American doctors emulate his work. They dream of abolishing malaria, and have already exterminated yellow fever in many places. With Dr. Nutter I had a long and interesting conversation as to the influence of

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endemic diseases on facial types. The physician, Dr. Whittaker, came over to the guest-house and attended to N.'s vaccinated arm, which needed help. An intelligent doctor is good company, especially in a place where entertainment is scarce. For Tela is not lively ; its thoughts are bent on bananas and on filling weekly steamers with them. There are few idle rich there ; social life seems lacking. It must be. I heard no scandal, and what is society without that ? I did, however, make the acquaintance of one whose range extended beyond bananas. He knew much about the animals and birds and insects of Honduras. He had shot jaguars and pumas, had deer and pisotis in his garden and a pet kinkajou. Like so many observers in the tropics, he is probably too modest to put down his observations. Belt, who wrote *A Naturalist in Nicaragua*, has too many silent brothers. A classic in being may abort many. If I knew a tenth as much as Mr. Davis, the Superintendant of stock at Port Arturo, I should write *A Naturalist in Honduras*. For Honduras, the least known of all the republics, is a marvellous field for observation. What we know of tropical life is much. What we do not know is beyond computation.

It is true that this coast is tropical. It can also be cold. Long years ago I learnt in anguish what a norther meant in Texas. I woke shivering with a parched skin and was never warm till a three days'

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bitter gale blew out. I did not know then that these winds from the icy north made their influence felt as far south as Honduras, and even across it to the Pacific. This we learnt at Tela, an open roadstead exposed to every blast from the north and scarcely sheltered from the east. A dim greyness covered the brilliant sky, the turquoise sea lost its colour, the thermometer lost its courage and crawled down. And then the chill wind blew and increased to a gale. The swell and the surf stirred up the shallows; the sea was a muddy grey with flying foam to windward. Fires and stoves are things unknown. The only drying fire is sunlight. We saw no sun for four days and the rain fell in torrents. The admirable beds in the guest-house had a sheet for covering, ample when the temperature is  $80^{\circ}$  or  $90^{\circ}$ , but at  $60^{\circ}$  a bitter jest. At night I covered myself with the contents of my portmanteau until everything that I wore outside the house was wet. In one day four pairs of trousers went off duty. My too much advertised rain-proof coats were apparently prohibitionists and water-drinkers. They got wet through in ten minutes of a comparatively light rain. We had breakfast at the guest-house. For other meals we had to walk half a mile in a ceaseless downpour. "If this is tropical," said N., "what do you call cold?" I chattered excuses for the weather and going indoors we played patience damply, while the flying foam beat through the wire

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screens of the verandah and lay about the floor in jelly-like coils. The sea at high tide came across the pathway and under the high-lifted foundations of the house. The water supply from the mountains at the back of Tela ran red and rusty, and baths were mud-baths. It was too cold to use them. This lasted for four days. On some occasions a norther lasts for seven or eight. I do not know what use the Hondurans make of northerns. In Texas one miserable cold partner of mine offered excuses for the freeze-out on the ground that it made nice cold weather for killing pigs. This was optimism indeed, and pure altruism into the bargain, as we had none to kill.

When the norther blew itself out and the sun shone again over a sea no longer resembling dirty suds I went up country to see how bananas grow. The Fruit Company is also a railroad company ; the banana breeds railways as it occupies new country. When low-lying but not too damp or swampy land is cleared for a new plantation, the old rail-head pushes on. This is all part of "peaceful penetration." The bush gives way to cultivation : the look of the land, the habits of the people and the politics of the whole country undergo changes. It seems that the appetite of the world for bananas has political "repercussions." The connection between a barrow-load of bananas in Whitechapel and American gunboats is not obvious. I shall

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show later how easy it is to link them together. The hunger of people and the hunger of capital for interest are things not alien but allied. Both lead to invasion. One great attraction for me in these republics was the sight of raw politics, unobsured and uncooked. In Europe we get them served up as made dishes, and the political cooks turn a party rat or dog into something savoury and attractive by adding a dash of philanthropy to the dish.

Finance, European and North American, penetrates into Central America like the banana and spreads. You cut the eye out of the root of a banana plant and put it in the ground. It shoots up ten or twenty or thirty feet, and in, say, fifteen months bears a "stem" or "bunch" or "count." A *peon* slices into the plant, which then bends over; he cuts away the fruit, and the plant-growth above ground dies. From the many "eyes" of the root spring other plants growing round their dead parent. These form a "mat," a ring of new plants. If fungus disease does not strike them these bear fruit and perish and renew themselves in a greater "mat." These bear in their turn and are slain by the bush knife or *machete*, that wooden-handled short sword which is as valuable to the Central American as raw-hide and stringy bark to the Australian. So Haiti's one plant has grown into a huge industry. There is a great financial "mat" on the Atlantic coast. Tela is one plant, Ceiba

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another, Puerto Cortés a third, Truxillo and Castillo a fourth, and these grow on the Honduranian coast only.

As I rode in a "car," which was a Ford body and chassis put on railroad wheels, with a fine specimen of the young planter employed out there, I found the bush enchanting. After the norther the world was dustless and every leaf bright green. This world was new to me; I could not name the *ceiba* tree, the *conicaste*, the *jenisaro* or any of the interlaced lianas. Nor did I know the *palma real*, the royal palm so like a gigantic heavenly feather-duster, or *bonacca* palm so fan-like in its early growth. Was it not obvious that one needed years to know the first thing in a place where the observer would perish ages before the last thing came in sight? In despair I turned to the banana and, at Progreso, to the men who ran the plantation, slew and burnt the bush for more plantations, and schemed how to run the rail to bring the fruit to the sea. The Company employs many hands and many types, American, English, Jamaican, Native Hondurans. Some of these were splendid young men. But many fail and return to their mothers. I was told that the English "stick it" better than most. The United States is so close to them that many Americans remember New Orleans is but a step from Puerto Barrios. It is true the life is arduous, the heat often tremendous, the damp as trying as that of

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the south-west monsoon in the Arabian Sea, and the *peons*, or labourers, capricious, difficult and, on *fiesta* and pay-days, drunken and apt to take to the *machete*. It seems to be the policy of the Company not to pay the young men highly. It is in some ways a good policy, for there are many opportunities for the capable. The incapable or barely capable are weeded out where better pay might keep them hanging on. So long as an underling is not married, does not drink and keeps away from the native women, he can do well. Those who don't for the most part go under. They become "returned empties." The best may become managers and even wealthy. There is a great scope for the intellect of management in a business in a country where every advance, every new concession has to be worked for in a ring of corruption.

All the world in Central America is corrupt. But corruption is the result of imperfection in the machine. As soon as the tribe passes as the ancient political unit each man is again for himself and his own. The new state may be the more gracious in the end, but the road to grace is hard to travel. In the United States corruption, the friction of the engine, is obvious if not open and blatant. We talk of England as individualistic. Long ago it ceased to be, since the English at least have learned to work together and know that political ease lies in the way of compromise. We also pay our judges

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and our politicians till they have no excuse for taking bribes or working a selfish “stunt.” Our Civil Service is permanent and pensioned. In the United States a short four years may be the lot of those who seek to lay by for the rainy days of political relegation to the shade. In Central America a revolution may happen at any date. To make hay while the political sun shines becomes the passion of the office-holders. For to-morrow they die : the Ins go out in rifle smoke ; the Outs come in with songs of greedy triumph. The Central American republics borrowed their constitutions from the United States. They borrowed an engine they cannot work. The mixed race is unfit for such high machinery, and the very corruption of the United States seems impossibly idealistic to the few idealists south of the Rio Grande.

Fain would I avoid politics in these sketches. One might as well try to avoid the tropic sun at noonday when riding over a vast plain. To get away from them would be to live in Peten with the fabled cannibals. The very air is political ; avoidance of politics is politic ! Touch the people and you touch politics. Enter trade and you are in politics. Railroads are political ; lighting and paving become international politics ; debt and loans are politics *in excelsis*. I pined to be a pure naturalist, to seek peace among the Arachnidæ and solace with alligators. One might think that physicians at least might get away from the conflict.

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A doctor is at the moment a more or less excellent tyrant in Salvador. Many doctors have been Presidents. They have not cured the ills of state. Even a coleopterist might become a president and have to study political beetles. But such a branch of natural history is as dangerous a study as any undertaken among fatal infections.

Honduras while we were at Tela had its recurrent political malaria. A hot fit was coming on. I do not propose to give details. They would be contradicted without doubt. But the fat, if not yet in the fire, was boiling in the frying-pan, and everyone was polishing up his weapons and taking his *machete*, actual and metaphorical, to the grind-stone. Those in power put their opponents in prison. Many fled to Guatemala and to Salvador. Congress was coerced as usual, though rumour had it that Congress would be allowed to settle everything. If a revolution did occur, Tela, though so far from the capital Tegucigalpa, would get busy. A seaport offers opportunities for making money. *El Commandante* can do well; there are various posts of illegal emolument to be obtained. I was almost sorry to leave Honduras at so interesting a juncture, for to be thoroughly steeped in the joys and excitements of Central America one should experience an earthquake, see a volcano in eruption, and catch malaria and a revolution. I was unfortunate to miss the battle of Tela, and shall tell

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its story later. We left Tela in the American steamship *Ellis*, and landed some hours later in Puerto Barrios, a port of Guatemala in the shelter of the Gulf of Amatique. Our simple adventures began.

## CHAPTER II

### QUIRIGÚA AND A DOCTOR

Puerto Barrios. A Spanish *fonda*. Dirt and manners. Cockroaches. The *marimba*. To Quirigua Hospital. Dr. Macphail. Malaria and yellow fever. Miracles in the jungle. Work of "The Company." "The Man in Red." Native methods with criminals. The Maya monoliths. Royal palms. "Menos los mulos!"

THOSE who do not know where Guatemala is may consult an atlas and find that it is the largest of the five Central American Republics. It is also, perhaps naturally, the least developed, the most mixed in population, and the fullest of native Indians who retain customs and habits which date from long before the time of the Mayas, Aztecs and Toltecs, just as pagan ceremonies exist now in Brittany, and very ancient modes of thought can be found among our own peasants.

But Puerto Barrios is a fruit port; there the railroad to Guatemala city begins; the Fruit Company is all powerful; it shows the powers of civilisation by oiling the streams and pools which once bred anophiline mosquitoes by the million. In Tela the great Company had been kind; it sent word to Puerto Barrios that I and my companion were coming. We were met by an apologetic

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official, who lamented that a dance was being given in the town, to which folks from all parts of the Company's activities were thronging in flocks. Probably there was not a room for either of us at the moment. Perhaps there might be one later. If not, there was the hotel. It had a Spanish name, and my heart sank as the sun went down and no word came of vacant rooms. It seemed that my new friend and some of his own guests proposed, on the compulsion of necessity, to dance all night, as they had given up their rooms to people from up-country. An hour after dark we went ashore with the help of a negro called "Major," who seems part of Barrios. Our delay had lost us the immediate attention of the Customs. An officer of the Aduana would come presently. He was at dinner in the hotel and displayed a calm determination to make a night of it, which was maddening. We left our things outside the Aduana in charge of Major, hoping to see them again, and went to the hotel in the dark. Its lights glittered before us at last ; it looked decent ; our hopes rose. We were offered rooms and were shown them.

The hotel seemed to consist largely of verandahs. It was so constructed that many of the rooms were inside-rooms without windows. Air and mosquitoes, the smell of cooking, the ceaseless din of the *marimba*, were admitted to each apartment by jalousies, or innumerable slats in the door. The light was

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electric, but the bulbs incompetent. N. went to one room and left it for the other. I could not blame a young woman for rejecting it. I should not blame a cleanly dog for howling to be let out of it. My slats were broken, and when an electrician, procured with much difficulty, produced light at last, everything I did was visible from the verandah. It is true that the light went out twice, a thing for which I was almost grateful, for I was then unable to see the dirt upon the floor. The room contained, on a fair computation, several quarts of varied Barrios soil, for it could not have been swept for a year. Even worse than that, the sheets had evidently been slept in, not by one traveller, unless indeed he was exceptionally liable to come off on clean linen, but by many. Clean things were un procurable, and the notion of having the room scraped out I rejected as soon as I thought of it. I should be eating and drinking dirt all night. And after all, in ancient times, had I not slept in worse places? And was this not Guatemala? I hung a few things upon nails, kept the others in a bag which I placed out of reach of the cockroaches, and went to ask how N. was getting on in her section of the Spanish palace.

Experience hardens us all. An experienced traveller may not grouse about things which at one time would have made him furious. The conduct of the neophyte when faced with the ordinary

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disasters of travel, dirt, disorder, insects, and the like is the true test of character. I had some confidence in my companion. She had shown decision of character in rejecting the room she left to me. She knew something of my old life and relied upon my endurance. I regarded this as a compliment, but half-wondered whether I should find her standing on a chair in her own room, surrounded by cockroaches and perhaps inclined to tears. I am glad to say she received me calmly, if with a certain grimness, as if she was saying to herself, " See what you have brought me to !" She had stood the first test, at any rate, for what is a trifle of sea-sickness or the discomfort of vaccination to real positive dirt seen for the first time in an hitherto sheltered life ? We went down to dinner in silence. The dining-room was big and full. It contained one man who cleared his throat of catarrh with vigour and spat upon the floor. N.'s appetite had already been lessened by contemplating, from the upper floor, part of the kitchen, where the food was being prepared by a big man clad merely in trousers and an open waistcoat. She now asked why no one killed this diner. I suggested that he would think it an outrage, and besides, might not the others wish to do as he did ? All the same, a murder or two in Spanish and Portuguese countries committed for the same reason might do much good. It seems a pity that so many killings occur for mere

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trifles, such as running away with a man's wife, when a good excuse like that absolutely goes begging.

After dinner we sat on the verandah, heard more raucous catarrhs in action, and watched the night. Miserable as these ports are, and it is hard to imagine anything but cash down inducing any to live in them, the tropical night is for ever lovely. The stars are not mere pin-pricks in a blue-grey vault, they are, as it were, hung in a wonderful clear space at varying distances. This is an illusion, even if it represents something of the truth, for the brighter stars seem more near, and a gigantic world of brilliant vapour like Betelgeuz in Orion looks farther away than some star of minor magnitude. Perhaps we lingered long on that verandah, for going to bed offered few attractions. Who knew what those rooms contained of vermin beyond the seen scuttling cockroach? The *cimex lectularius* might be there, the skunk of the bed-chamber, and even worse. Quien sabe? And still for ever the Guatemalan *marimba*, with its eight players, resounded barbarically in the hotel itself and from the dining-hall in which the Company's dance was being held. But at nine, seeing that we had been up at dawn in Tela and that the train for Guatemala City left as early, we chanced fate and retired to our separate dirty and airless dens, where it may be we cursed till silence fell.

It was a Mr. Rayor, then I think Acting Manager

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for that banana district, who had received us. After spending a night on his feet he saw us off, and insisted that we should stay at Quirigúa and see the hospital there. Of this I had heard at Tela. Dr. Nutter and Dr. Whittaker spoke of a Dr. Macphail. I found later that this doctor is as modest as he is kindly, and therefore hesitate to put down what I heard of him. Let it be understood that at Quirigúa, some sixty miles from Barrios, I had to see a great hospital, Maya monoliths and ruins of infinite interest, and a physician. We left in the shadows before dawn and ran instantly into a primeval forest, altered here and there by banana plantations which extended even beyond our next halting-place. Now there was no dust, the rain of the norther had laid it and washed the tangled vegetation clean. We passed through long alleys of bananas with their great split leaves, past palm-groves of the royal palm, and the great fans of the bonacca, by gigantic ceibas tangled with lianas, and by all the unnamed growth of the damp tropics. Eighteen miles from Quirigúa lay Virginia, the working head-quarters of the Company in that district. It looked like a clean box of toy-houses, painted red and yellow, with clear grassy green spaces and everything about them as spick and span as Kew Gardens. Indeed, Kew is wilder than this clearing made in jungle that once looked an impossible wilderness. The Company likes order and gets it. Till I saw

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Quirigúa I thought Virginia a miracle. It was after all only something neatly done. The miraculous came at Quirigúa and with it the magician. In dreams we arrive at the impossible and are not surprised. Merely to be in a train in Guatemala after so many years in literary London, with my ancient memories of plain and forest dimmed by time, was a dream. We came to Quirigúa and I accepted it calmly, for Dr. Macphail met us and smiled, and the world looked a good place and homely. Yet this valley was once a death-trap ; yellow fever was at home there ; the parasites that carry malaria were in every native's veins ; every anopheline mosquito carried them in the pathless thickets and every pool and mark of a horses' hoof held their larvæ. Once in my life I spent a day and a night in an Irish Trappist monastery. These monks, not always so silent as men believe, since workers must have leave to speak, had taken a hill-side covered with heather and made of it a fertile paradise. Their religion believes in miracles ; at meals they read us incredible accounts of impossible saints who achieved the ridiculous and pathetic, and they did not see that they themselves, not saints but toiling monks, had wrought the real miracle and helped mankind ; and here, in the death valley of Quirigúa, an even greater miracle has been worked by years of faithful and patient labour.

It was not Dr. Macphail who first planned

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and built the hospital on that cleared hill-side, now a Garden of Eden with flowers that flourish only in the tropics, but it was he who made it what it is. If he did not empty the box of helpful toys in that forest he set them up and adorned them. And it was he who cleared the valley of disease. One may go out at night and see a cinema set up in the unscreened railroad shed, and come back late at night with every reasonable hope that the mosquitoes that bit you were as harmless as English midges by a trout stream. Some years ago yellow fever, carried by the *stegomyia fasciata*, much more than merely decimated a nearby village. Half the population died. Now the *stegomyia*, a domestic house-mosquito, which seems to have evolved along with man, is rare and if found is not infected. The native population is hard to deal with. It is ignorant, stubborn, superstitious. A prayer is better than prophylaxis, a saint better than a surgeon; one priest, however foolish or fanatic or gross, of more avail than a physician. But the Doctor (who is *the doctor*) went among them, upset their precious water barrels and tubs, in which the larvæ of the mosquitoes that carry malaria and yellow fever germs are found, and went away leaving them smiling. An Irishman may have, so they say, "a way with him." This kindly and determined Scotchman availed where others wrought nothing. His "way" is not to be analysed, but I guessed it

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when I went round the wards with him at Quirigúa. I have been round many hospitals and have seen many surgeons and physicians speaking to their patients. Little but praise is their due. But Macphail spoke to the sick as if they were his friends, as if he loved them, as indeed he does. Let him be modest as he likes, he must endure all this, for I have never seen anything more touching and beautiful than the way he put his arm round the shoulders of a poor old native woman and helped and encouraged her on the painful road to inevitable death. Let that suffice. He was also kind to us.

To say the hospital was clean is to use a minimising figure of speech. What it seemed to me and N. after the Barrios hotel can be imagined. Consider the ways of the country, its sublime indifference to dirt. We know there were saints who wallowed their way to heaven in much vermin and virtue. Wherever the Fruit Company goes it builds clean houses, big hospitals, and shows what can be done by steady work. I have no leanings in favour of capital and capitalists. Rather do I incline the other way. Also much may be said for a natural lazy life. We can well wonder whether our civilisation is worth it. Still the Company has lighted a torch in Central America which may be hard to put out and many of the worthiest citizens of Guatemala have come to Quirigúa mainly to see

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the Maya monuments and have gone away to wonder and to praise the hospital. It treats the native population as well as those employed by the Company. We had rooms in a long corridor and revelled in white sheets and bathrooms, in electric light and the perfect service of trained natives of the country. If volcanic streams are left out of account, there are two places in Central America where hot baths may be obtained, at Quirigúa and in the *Hôtel Grace* in Guatemala City. It is well for travellers to know this. They can look forward to the city of the uplands and even to being ill at Quirigúa. There, too, they can even play a mild kind of golf in this Garden of Eden, and find a ball lost among hibiscus or snuggling down by the side of a fallen coco-nut. They will see humming-birds among the flowers and a tame deer upon the lawns. While they play they may even chance upon drama, and melodrama at that, as I did on the Sunday before we went on upward to the high city.

It was the late afternoon when Macphail, Ross the surgeon, and Wightman the engineer, were playing golf and I was looking on, that I saw a procession coming up the hill-side from the railroad station and shed. It was made up of some thirty people, a considerable crowd for Quirigúa, except when the trains come in. As it drew nearer I noticed the head of the procession was formed by a man in red and two men in uniform. I drew the

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doctor's attention to them and he said, "Ah! I suppose this ends our golf." We walked together to meet the visitors as they came up the stone steps, and I saw the man in red closer. He walked with his eyes shut and staggered. The men in uniform were armed police; they supported the chief character of this native play. As he drew level and paused I noted that he was not wholly red behind. His white shirt there had but one broad band of crimson. And as he walked crimson dropped upon the white pathway, for he was red with his own blood. There was a cut in his skull that two fingers could have been laid in. This was the result of the Sunday *aguardiente*, or "white-eye," which is white rum and deadly. Every Sunday, every *fiesta*, every pay-day is marked by the machete in red. And when you say, "Who did this?" the answer mostly is, "Mi amigo." This man's amigo came in later with a stab wound that missed his spleen by a hair's breadth. The man with the machete wound in his skull was taken upstairs and Macphail cut away his hair, cleared away the blood, caught the veins and arteries with forceps, looked into his foolish brain, and finally got him to bed, having hopes that he might survive for other fiestas, since common wounds, or even uncommon wounds, often seem little to this tough half-Indian race. Later when in Nicaragua Gasteazoro told me how he found one campisto ripped open by barb-wire, and

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having no instruments was in despair at dealing with such a wound in the open country far from help. It was impossible at first to close the wound. I need not go into details. Surgeons will understand. Even those who know nothing of surgery will comprehend if I say it is not easy to get everything back into a full-burst portmanteau. But at last the man fainted, and seizing the favourable moment, Gasteazoro closed the wound, "dust, dirts, ants and all," he said, and sewed him up with anything at hand. And the man got well. So it seems did the man in red and "su amigo," as I learnt much later. It is better to be an Indian-blooded fool than a European philosopher when arguing with the machete.

With an American surgeon, a Scotch doctor and English nurses, these people at any rate get a chance if the authorities do not tie them up and start inquiring into the crime before they tie an artery. This is often the way in Honduras. I know one doctor came near fighting the police before he could get a patient, a bad machete case, into the hospital. It is true that the wounded man had killed a Honduranian, but it is equally true that the dead man had chopped down his employer from behind without warning. At Quirigúa the police had more sense, or it may be there was no "judge" with his eye on dollars. You can clean out a prisoner in a cell, but in an American hospital

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he is safe from robbery. The nurses at Quirigúa were, I feel, a happy family. The matron, Miss Ellerby, came from the Middlesex Hospital. She had worked under my old friend and surgeon Sir John Bland-Sutton, and was glad to get news of his continued activity. English and American nurses in Central America may show the people there what nursing is at its best. As the Quirigúa matron took N. round the buildings some native character was displayed. The matron unlocked the store-room door and showed among the stores two men who were cleaning up the place. As it was impossible to detail anyone to watch them they, like the food they handled, were put under lock and key. They did not resent this. Theft is a legitimate means of acquisition in some countries, just as head-hunting in others leads to a sense of superiority and it may be to "positions of emolument." We need not feel superior to these poor fellows. There are many paths to the House of Lords, and an undisclosed but recognised malefactor may be a Member of Parliament. With a political Miss Ellerby and a key we might get work out of some who combine brains with predacious instincts and are scarce to be trusted in the treasury.

An English worker would rightly fill the air with his outcries at being locked up. He might have ideas as to perquisites, but his wisdom would

## QUIRIGÚA AND A DOCTOR

at least lead him not to clean out the storeroom, as they would do at Quirigúa, without a lock in action. Most of us have notions about not muzzling the oxen who tread out the corn. These are natural inclinations. I own to having had a hand in broaching cargo, and honesty at times bows before dire necessity. But the people here have much Indian blood in their veins. The strain of Spaniard in them is often as thin as six-water grog. Their ancestors were dominated for untold centuries by dead and buried civilisations. They grew meek under ruthless authority and terrible gods. I shall not pretend to instruct any in the Maya civilisation. Much is said of it, more guessed, and little is known. They used a skilful scheme of hieroglyphics, not yet wholly deciphered, were good astronomers, and could rise to the conception of millions, and had a far less cruel and bloody religion than the Mexicans. The Mayas between the time of the Christian Era and some unknown date in our Middle Ages built and carved strange monuments in Honduras, Guatemala and Yucatan. Some of the finest obelisks were discovered in the bush a mile or two from Quirigúa. The Fruit Company's railroad runs within a few hundred yards of them, and a man with a machete is kept there to mow down the ever-increasing bush, which even in a year might once more hide them. The only use Nature has for human monuments is to climb upon them. Though

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two carved obelisks stand erect others have fallen, and the buildings are rapidly disintegrated by the roots of plants and trees. The standing monuments, taking in the buried parts of them, are perhaps some thirty feet in height and three by four feet square. They must weigh fifty tons. We may wonder how they were erected, how brought there. When our civilisation passes and our language is forgotten, our alphabet a mystery, how many of our buildings will stand like these obelisks ?

More exist at Palenque, Menche Tinimit, and Copan, in Honduras. I meant to visit that ruined city. But when in Salvador the Honduranian revolution was at its height. I might have got there alone, but with a young woman to look after the risk was too great. And it may be owned that I should not have been allowed to go by myself. The young, who know not disaster, adore risks. A little may be spice, but much may be poison. I declined the expedition with regret, though after all I was more interested in the living than the dead, in to-day rather than yesterday, in to-morrow more than to-day.

If danger deterred me from venturing to Copan, as it might have stayed Panurge, mosquitoes drove us both from the Maya monuments. Mosquitoes hate sunlight, but the sky clouded and in the shadow of the bush they abounded. It is impossible to oil all the pools in the tropics, and a swamp had to be

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crossed twice. Malaria seems a comparative trifle till you have it or see others burn and freeze in periodical fits. So far I had avoided it in Australia, Africa, and North America, and hated the notion of acquiring practical knowledge of the three different plasmodia in Central America. In that respect my luck continued. And so far I congratulated myself on not having acquired a "jigger," that accursed female flea which buries itself in the feet and seeks to hatch out her eggs in human flesh. I did not know that I was even then carrying one with me, to be discovered only when in Guatemala City.

We left Quirigúa on a Monday morning. We regretted to part with Paradise scarlet with hibiscus blossom and purple with bougainvillea. Even a bonacca palm loaded down with black *sopilotes*, or buzzards, was something to remember. Young royal palms against the purple hills at evening remain as one of the pictures no traveller forgets. And memory recalls the almost musical chatter of the "black-birds," whatever their true name may be. There were times that the whole fair landscape looked magical and romantic; at others it became the background for some fierce tropical opera. One expected troops of dancers and singers, and then down came the sudden veil of night, while in the shaven grass light-bearing beetles or insects showed sudden occulting torches that shone brighter than the lamps of the few fire-flies. It would have been

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sadder to leave Quirigúa had I not known that in all probability we should return from Salvador and far Nicaragua partly by the way we came.

We caught the morning train in good order. At Quirigúa things do not go wrong. We were bound for places where they went right by accident. There was an American one night at Quirigúa who told us how he and others were once to make an important expedition, having to leave a certain Spanish *fonda* at a given hour. When he and his companions reached the rendezvous they asked the proprietor if everything was ready. He smiled and bowed and answered, "Todo esta listo, menos los mulos!" Everything was ready but the mules.

We entered the true country of "menos los mulos!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE VALLEY OF THE MOTAGUA

News from Guatemala City. To the city. The Rio Motagua. Alligators. Flowering trees. A giant's garden. Water action. Dry and wet belts. Colour in Guatemala. Zacapa.. Night. The iron trestle bridge. The lights of Guatemala City.

THE doctor at Quirigúa is not a "busy" man.

He cannot afford to be. It is those who do nothing who are for ever busy doing it and have no time to themselves. Macphail does so much that he always has leisure for other people. He even telegraphed to Guatemala City to find out when a boat left San José de Guatemala for La Libertad in Salvador. He got a clear categorical reply. It looked convincing. We had three days for the city. I never applied the doctrine of "menos los mulos," and even Macphail seemed satisfied that the information was correct.

Of course, the train was somewhat late at Quirigúa. On this railroad the engineers, or drivers, are Central Americans. The trains are characteristically American; the locomotives built by Baldwin's. They all use a whistle of the steamship type, which I found curiously disturbing. To hear a steamboat whistle in the middle of tropical forest is incongruous

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with the scene. The train possessed an observation or chair-car for which an extra fee was charged. For this fee we got the fullest possible supply of dust as soon as we emerged from the coastal forest belt. It may be dustier on the West Coast of South America at Antofogasta and Mexillones, say, where it rains once perhaps in thirty years and all drinking water is distilled from the sea, but it seemed impossible on the train to believe it. The sister and wife of the manager at Puerto Castillo came with us from Quirigúa. One wore a black dress which gradually became white. The porter, who used a whisk to rouse up the settled dust into further activity, brought this lady's frock back to its normal colour. Our faces, however, remained muddy with dust and perspiration which ran like hot grease paint. We were mostly striped and mottled in appearance and as picturesque as clowns after a pantomime rally.

For a long way we ran alongside the River Motagua. Its valley presents the only easy practicable railroad route to the upland on which the city stands. It is a splendidly picturesque stream, in places full af alligators. To her delight N. spotted one on a sand-spit. There are two species, or at least varieties, in Central America, one on the Atlantic and the other on the Pacific coast. The spectacled alligator is only found in South America. I saw none of these reptiles, though I sat in the open part of the observation car. The

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aspect of the country in the dry belt is that of extreme aridity. The vegetation grows scanty, the dry *sacate* plant turns the land yellowish in colour. But the flowering trees make full amends for the lack of forests and green palms. One is a mass of pale-blue purple like wistaria, another a great cone of scarlet, a redder scarlet than hibiscus, and a third is adorned with pale yellow trumpet flowers of an unimaginable purity. Many of these trees are forty or fifty feet high. They flourish on the steep sides of *barrancos*, and in dry *arroyos*, which are waterless river-beds in summer, they make a giant's garden. Here and there we passed desolate little villages. A good enough house can be made of a few uprights, a thatch of leaves from native American palms, a hammock or two and a clay oven shaped like a gigantic bee-hive. We passed through many little towns full of like houses. The population came down to sell us *tamales*, mangoes, oranges, boiled eggs deprived of their shells, their natural protection against dirt, and big cocoa-nuts in the husk, but pierced for drinking. Girls and boys swarmed into the cars and deafened us with appeals, while naked babies ran or crawled outside in the dirt and the pitiless sun. The farther we went and the higher the altitude reached the hotter the day grew and the more wildly desolate the aspect of the valley. Here and there were strange signs of the ancient action of water. Huge rounded hills squatted as

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it were in the very pathway of the river and the rail. They looked alien, imported, unnatural. Now the Motagua ran thinly, though it comes from afar, even beyond the city. The whole world looked dry.

As so often happens. I found that I, a European, stood the heat better than many of the natives. But the truth is that they are right to avoid it and the excessive rays of the sun. It is always best in the tropics to follow the customs of the country. The *siesta*, which really means the hot time of the day and not properly the rest taken then, is the time for inactivity and the hammock. But I found that the dry air of these hills instantly relieved my breathing. I could have told blindfold when we left the stream of forests by that alone. To breathe better is to relieve the heart and the mind. The body has less to do. I took ten times the interest in this country of dust than in the damp forest. There is something oppressive and even melancholy in mass on mass of green, however varied its tints. But the reds and blues and burning browns, the scarlets and yellows of flowers, stimulate, and cannot burden, the heart.

Now in one deep part of the Motagua valley we at last lost the westering sun. A little coolness breathed upon us at happy moments, and among rocks the dust was less. The colour in the shadows grew deeper and more wonderful, fine greys and

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deep blues were half atmosphere and half the colour of the stones. On the barren heights, that a little while ago had glared pitilessly, soft gold shone, and here and there as we passed the lessening but bright Motagua the flowers bloomed again in scarlet, blue and yellow among bright or darker greens. An artist would have seized his palette and again put it by in despair. These are things to remember so far as memory may serve, but words and paint alike fail before the raiment of the tropic uplands. Here night did not wrap itself in "a mantle grey"; she came swiftly in colours to which the glory of the heavenly bow is crude, and even when her robe was "star-enwrought" the sense of colour remained, and again and again was revivified as we climbed and saw once more the high gleams of the descending sun. Here in this country are schemes of colour no European could invent: they surpass the glories of Taormina itself and the shadowy robe of Etna. It is from these natural colours of their world that the natives draw the cruder tints and contrasts and harmonies of their weaving.

Long before this we had passed Zacapa, whence some day when it pleases the Central American gods a rail will run direct to San Salvador. But the gods of Guatemala are slow gods; one might think they had left Zacapa to dust and the devils of dirt and drink. I remembered Laramie Junction in the United States, and though these are different

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desolations in desolate places, I bracketed Zacapa equal with Laramie and honoured hell with a *proxime accessit*. Far-off Tela became a paradise ; Barrios a refuge. Flies and children pestered us ; we ate dust and thirsted and made jokes of discomforts and talked of the wonders of the city which lay ahead of us. And by now the train was an hour late. Once we stayed on an up-grade. Perhaps the locomotive engineer went somewhere for a piece of string to tie up the “foo-foo valve.” Perhaps he had a love affair to conduct in a native shack. Quien sabe ? We went on at last.

Now finally we were in the night, and hunger came down on us all. Someone wangled a few bananas, and we ate them greedily. They cleared the mouth of dust. In spite of fatigue three of us who were English or American kept going, though even a voluble Costa-Rican ceased to tell me all he knew of America, including the Five Republics. And then, definitely two hours late, we came to the high iron trestle bridge over the deep barranco close to Guatemala City. This cleft in the earth is hundreds of feet deep. It may be an earthquake gap, or perhaps it was cut out by the floods of the rainy season. I looked down and saw the faint gleam of a crawling creek, and looked up to see the dim starry glitter of the lights of Guatemala. We ran slowly into the station, and there I was greeted by “Are you Mr. Roberts ?” The beneficence of

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the doctor of Quirigúa was endless. The man who spoke came from our hotel. In five minutes we were in a car which bumped slowly over the tilted stone blocks which form a pavement for this Central American Paris.

The journey had been trying, but worth even the dust and heat. Yet it was not unpleasant to know that something to eat awaited us and, even better than that, a hot bath. I like Central America, but do not care to carry more than a little of it about with me.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PAGEANT OF GUATEMALA CITY

An earthquake city. "Central American "information." "Cuatras palabras." Pesos and dollars. "Pompeii" of the high plains. Emptiness of the city. The passing of races. Remaining Indians. The cemetery. Burial customs. The market. Sense of Colour. The *marimba*. "Nuestro vecino del Norte." The passing of racial pageants.

SHORTLY after the war an English officer came out to Central America for peace, rest, and a change. He could not rightly have belonged to the Intelligence Branch. He was no prophet and lacked foresight, for he struck the earthquake which struck down Guatemala City, and the revolution which cast Cabrera from his precarious pinnacle of power and made an interned prisoner of an apparently strong and truly brutal tyrant. Guatemala is, indeed, an earthquake city. It is mostly single-storied buildings ; two stories are an experiment ; three rash folly.

The city stands on something more or less like a plain five thousand feet above the sea. In the morning and the evening the air is often chilly, even in the summer of Christmas time. It is windy, but not so dusty as it might be : the dislocated road

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pavement, made of sets laid down by chance at every angle, at least prevents the earth beneath being churned into mud or powder by cars and *carretas*, by horses and oxen. My first impression was one of a cold and unlovely place ; it pleased me to think that in three days we should see the last of it. I went round the corner to a certain bank and asked for my *Changuinola* friend Sawyer, who had told me about Gasteazoro. I went to his room and stood in the doorway. He looked up and exclaimed, "Dios, it's you!" Good that he remembered me : we learn to expect forgetfulness and not to resent it. In less than five minutes I discovered that the authoritative telegram to Quirigúa about the steamer from San José to La Libertad was Central American information. By this I mean that it was strictly inaccurate ; my three days were at once extended to ten ; I had an extra week to think over "menos los mulos," or in this case "menos el vapor."

Like Macphail of Quirigúa Sawyer is not busy. He did so much and did it so easily that he had time to give us hospitality as well as advice. Our united Spanish was more than the traditional "cuatras palabras," but it was inadequate. N. had only been learning it for a month or two and could speak better than she could understand. My ancient Spanish had disappeared. Before I was twenty I could read it easily, and could even swear

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in it seven years later when I worked with Mexicans in Texas. Midshipman Easy learnt his Spanish in the uninhabited Zafferine Islands, where there were "plenty of ground sharks." I learnt mine in the bush of Australia when stranded with nothing to read but a big grammar and a vast quantity of excerpts from Spanish literature. N. wanted to go shopping. Tropical rain on the coast, the results of vaccination, and the dust had wrought havoc which had to be repaired. A young French lady working in the bank was "seconded" for her assistance. To shop in Spanish America without Spanish and a sound knowledge of values and currency is rash. A *peso* ought to be worth a dollar at par. When we reached Guatemala the exchange was  $62\frac{1}{2}$  pesos for the dollar. English money is useless save for exchange; American money goes everywhere except among the native population in the country. The value of American money and the freedom with which it passes from hand to hand are great signs of the North American influence of which I shall have to speak later. The dollar (*oro*) or gold dollar of the United States is the great standard. Only the forced currency dollar of Nicaragua, the *Cordoba*, equals it, and its forced equality leaves the Nicaraguan without cash for business. So far as we were concerned Mademoiselle Petit of the bank became our finance minister. I should prefer her in that post to any minister of

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finance in the Five Republics. A gold piece stuck to the greased bottom of the measure in which Ali Baba reckoned his money. The greased hand of official finance in Central America takes a heavier toll than that, for what is one gold piece among the greased palms of the many who share it?

I did not greatly like the city, but we found kindness there at least. The people are pleasant and polite: they may rob you, but they do it civilly, and reduce prices without resentment or great haggling if you refuse to be taken in. But the city is wide and white and cold-looking. There is no good architecture in it. Earthquakes are friendly to builders, but hostile to architects who think in stone. Some enthusiastic Guatemaltecos call the city the Paris of Central America, but it is no more like Paris than *la ville lumière* is like Pompeii. Indeed, Guatemala resembles that disinterred city of Vesuvius: it still shows the ghastliest wounds from the terrible earthquake of 1918. All such low-built towns have an air of melancholy expectation, unless, as in San Salvador, their streets are crowded with busy and not unhappy people. Even apart from the lonely and ruinous aspect of the suburbs, once full of fine houses with splendid gardens in which weeds now grow, the widespread city seems half-deserted. In the days of the President-Tyrant Cabrera, who fell as it were by an earthquake, in 1920, it is said that people acquired

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the habit of staying at home. Home might not be safe, but it was more secure to be there than to sit in the Plaza and talk, since any indiscreet word might be caught by one of Cabrera's numberless spies. The city rose furiously against him in the end and besieged him in his palace. He bombarded it in his turn, but finally surrendered, stipulating meekly for his life. Now that the sick tyrant, who at any rate secured peace for many years, is interned in his own house, after being flung from power in bloodshed, the people are still quieter than they were before Cabrera kept them in bitter order by the whip and sword.

Frankly, the city is depressing. The ceaseless barbaric *marimba*, that derivative of some ancient xylophone, with its eight players, for which these folks have a great passion, chanted to me nothing of hope, but something of the dead past of ancient races. Though most of the city's busiest quarters has arisen white and glaring from a tomb of piled masonry, many buildings still in ruin, such as one notes in Kingston, Jamaica, reminded me that here, in what used to be the Queen-City of Central America, is the memory of fallen powers and majesties and the sunken hopes and aspirations of ancient, half-forgotten races. In many European countries we may feel this, and yet are consoled because the past civilisation still survives by inheritance. But in Guatemala there once reigned

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the pride and insolence of Spain, and now to its mixed races of citizens the little finger of many states is thicker than the loins of Castile and all its kings. Before Spain broke into the Caribbean there were monarchs here whose memory has not survived the drums and trampings of three conquests. Some of their vacant monuments exist, but their sacred ashes blow about the streets in which the children of their subjects, the surviving races of Indians, still make an unending pageant. Yet it was said by a great writer, but now gone from among us, that when the very name and fame of England went the Sussex peasant, however changed, would plough the uplands and keep sheep upon the Downs. So it is here, where nineteen Indian languages are still spoken, for only a few students know aught of Toltec, Aztec, Maya or Nahuatl. This city is yet vivid with striped colours and voluble with the dialects of its unchanged Indian tribes. They are, in many essentials, what they were before Cortés overpowered Mexico and Balboa looked upon the Pacific. It is their very stability which makes all else around them seem so fluent, so evanescent. Who are these white people about the streets ? By his fire under a rude shelter of palm thatch some old Indian might ask that question. Earthquakes shake down these cities, the hut survives. So the fathers of these might have spoken when the varying tides of conquering races overwhelmed their country

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and died and were forgotten in the mists of a relative antiquity.

Few of these Indians care to learn Spanish. Nor will they work where a knowledge of it might come insensibly. They till their patch of earth for maize, they wear and sell their barbaric weavings ; they carry great burdens as *cargadores* and peddle wares among their fellows. They marry among themselves, and live apart from the world under the shadow of their ancient tribal laws. What their religion is who can say ? It may be that the Catholic priests know and will not tell. Their own rites may pass before the secret worship of their people dies at last. For such tribes are the repositories of human thought from which sprang many religions which did not endure.

The blood of the Indians runs in the veins of most in these Five Republics. But those who rule here possess neither the past of the Indians nor a true one of their own. Some students do not deny their American blood, and show pride in the monuments of Quirigúa and Copan. Most care nothing for these things and live for the moment. Even death and burial are for many things that pass and leave no trace. Walls forty feet high with niches in them make a cemetery for this city. Coffins, often richly ornamented, are placed in these for a few years, and after a while are burnt and the dust of the dead is confounded in a common tomb.

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In the great earthquake these walls were cast down. The shelter houses of those who had gone were destroyed with the houses of the living. Long before the re-building of either the sound of the marimba was heard in the streets. Perhaps more than most the Central American says, "Let us live while we can. Life is a passing show." But faith of race survives in the Indians, it may be, and in those nearest to the soil.

I would not have it thought that Guatemala is a melancholy city to all or in every quarter. A sight of the market would contradict the assumption. A market-place is often a key-note, or index, to the nature of a people. Here it is for ever crowded, and in its narrow alley-ways those who proffer their wares in stalls, or sit as silent as carved images by their baskets, have less anxiety in their faces than may be noted everywhere in European cities. In it can be seen the great predominance of Indian blood, though now and again some whiter slip of a girl looks like a pale flower among her coloured sisters. Most indeed are more akin to some tiger-lily than to the blossom of the Madonna. Nearly all who sell things are women ; each has her wares, weavings, fruit or flowers. They laugh or shout, and though they rarely solicit the passer-by they love to chaffer. They are very curious about new colours and materials if they deal in their simple textiles. I went through the market with Mlle. Petit, who wore

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a blouse of remarkable tint and pattern. The women followed her, and when she paused fingered her garment and talked with each other eagerly. There was more than a little of the artist in them. It must come from their Indian blood. The whiter ruling classes seem to lack it. Like the citizens of the United States, taken as a whole artistic taste is wanting in them. In music they, too, have succumbed to the marimba, and even degrade its barbaric quality by insisting on jazz. The marimba is called the national instrument of Guatemala. It is essentially savage; it might remind many of the wild drums of the African bush. With native simple music it would perhaps have a rude dignity and appeal. Now the people demand a negro melody in syncopated savagery and crowd to hear uproar, since they know no better. They play it at every cinema, and indeed jazz fits the jargon of the films, which begins to poison English. The influence of the United States, for ever increasing here, is not, from the point of view of a noble language or a dignified art, wholly for good.

As one cannot move anywhere in these states without seeing a volcano, dead or sleeping, so at every turn politics creep in. The Central Americans of the whiter order may accept such art from "our neighbour of the north," *nuestro vecino del Norte*, but they dread the power and overshadowing bulk of the United States. They fear for their inde-

stable authority is better than the rule of a temporary tyrant, or anarchy when no strong man appears. But mixed, not truly mingled, races have not, it would seem, the true coherence necessary for self-rule. The end is inevitable. Yet what a pity it is, for it must seem a pity to many, that what might have remained a Spanish American pageant, varied, strange, and so full of colour, must in the end, unless some miracle happens, become an integral part of the great American procession which moves with its stolen negro melodies towards some unknown end.

Guatemala Antigua, with its great palaces, cathedral and convents, lies buried beneath the mud of El Agua, and little indeed of it remains for any to wonder at. The Spanish pageant has passed, the Spanish-American passes ; and the Pan-American show, which may well move to the marimba, comes upon the scene. It may mean prosperity that can be translated into more peace and dollars and better health, but, after all, will it be in any way more grateful to the student of humanity than that which now passes away ? And as I ask the question I remember the past empires here, and wonder whether it may not be that, when the United States and the looked-for Pan-America

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have crumbled into dust, the grave or laughing Indians of Guatemala will yet be working at their looms or passing in their ancient tribal colours through the ruined streets of a great forgotten city.

## CHAPTER V

### VOLCAN AGUA AND ANTIGUA

The doctrine of mañana. *Gringos*. Corruption forced. Women and manners. Athletes and morals. *Niguas*. Antigua and Volcan Agua. *Cargadores* and "occupational" anatomy. Antigua's architecture. "Power" in buildings. Modern Central American work. Religious beliefs. Priests and *Sopilotes*. Weddings, comedy of. Marriage fees. Illegitimacy. On writing travels.

ONE can at least remain in Guatemala City in comfort if forced by the people's striking disregard for time and seasons to linger beyond expectation. In spite of the irritation caused to Europeans by this habit, the longer one lives in Central America the more reasonable it seems to disregard everything but the moment. Our European custom is to believe we shall live to-morrow. We have our own doctrine of mañana after all. The Central American relegates work to the future and lives in the present. We fret and toil to-day, for to-morrow we shall live. And we don't. Like the working bees we really live for the hive, not for ourselves, and calling ourselves individualists are self-centred social workers, toiling unhappily for we know not what. I knew an Oriental who told me that his first (and his last) impression of England was that the English in London were mad afreets

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hurrying for no discernible reason through the streets of hell.

Guatemala is not a very expensive place to stay in. Good hotels and boarding-houses can be found without difficulty, and in them any can live for much less than five dollars a day. No crowd of tourists has raised prices to an extreme, and the gringos living in the city are there for business. A gringo is a foreigner, and foreigners are not liked, but there is seldom any obvious animus against them, although at times there have been savage revolts against their presence. Outside of business they live their own lives and rarely, if ever, touch politics, except in the way of natural bribery and corruption. As they are those who pay cash, such incursions into political life are not resented. Corruption is indeed natural here. All native officials are underpaid. No man's salary keeps him : he often has to give more than he gets legally for an office which, when properly exploited, becomes a position of emolument. Yet everyone is polite, and regrets sorrowfully that this or that cannot be done without bribery. "Los otros," the men above him, must be paid. He will pass on your money. You do not ask what his rake-off will be.

In Guatemala City I met mostly Europeans, the exceptions being a few native citizens with whom I played chess. These beat me or got beaten with equanimity. They are naturally courteous to men or

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women. In most Latin or half-Latin European cities the conduct of the men as regards the other sex is curious and not always pleasant to behold. In this "Paris" of the earthquake line I saw none of the disagreeables common to the great Paris of Europe. Any woman going about her business quietly is not followed or accosted. It is true that the young native girls are always to be seen two or more together or with a duenna. But an English or American girl may walk alone and in peace. That is not so in Paris. I have heard Frenchwomen speak with distaste, even with disgust, about their own pursuing countrymen, who largely prefer women-hunting in the streets to any other kind of sport.

I suppose we must admit that the Latin races and those with a little Latin blood in them are more "immoral" than the English. By this I do not mean to claim more sex morality in action for the English or the British generally. It is the mental attitude that I refer to. No Englishman approves openly of immorality or sex irregularity : he does not regard it as the right thing. Women-hunting as a sport he reprobates. The Frenchman appears to regard it as legitimate : at the worst it is an amiable weakness. What is the cause of the difference ? Perhaps this may be put down entirely to the influence of athletics. We know that school-masters deliberately use games as a sedative for

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possible youthful sex ardour. Boys so brought up continue to play and hunt. Their sporting instincts are at least partially satisfied. Even the poorer classes exhaust a Saturday afternoon, that the Latins would devote to a girl chase, by looking on at football. To look on and bellow for hours takes it out of them almost as much as if they had played. Perhaps they thus acquire some feeling of sportsmanship as regards women. Even if they do not, the girls have a close time on Saturday afternoons, a time of dangerous reaction from the labours of the week.

We have, to our sorrow and the loss of much of our pride, taught the world athletics. Our school-masters have thus influenced the whole world. They may in the end modify the Latins themselves, who will, perhaps, at last cease to look on war and women-hunting as the only sports possible for men. If the Central Americans are "immoral," and I suppose they are, the reason may be that they do not play football. But they are not so obviously over-sexed and lubricious as many Europeans.

There are many Germans in Guatemala. They have a club there in which some eleven of them celebrated with joy the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Two Englishmen heard them and went in. They broke up the *fiesta*, chased the celebrants into the street and wrecked the bar-room. Little was said of this by the defeated, yet in Central America the

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Teuton is not unpopular. His lack of manners is his greatest crime.

The city, being so high above the sea, is not greatly pestered by flies, mosquitoes, or other tropical insects. I regret to say that I imported some for myself, the particular pest known as a "jigger" or *chigoe*, or in local Spanish a *nigua*. This is a minute black flea, the female of which on being fertilised buries herself in the human foot, preferably in the folds of a toe, and grows to a mere egg-sack, the size, perhaps, of a small pea. This objectionable creature also affects the pig, which cannot cut them out. Originating as it seems in Brazil, the jigger has spread far to the north, and is now making new conquests in Africa. In Central America, where pigs are plentiful and everyone goes barefoot, it is a mother's duty to inspect her children's feet daily lest some neglected jigger should cause ulceration, even the loss of a toe. They scratch the animal out with anything handy, such perhaps as the point of a piece of barbed wire, merely taking care not to break the egg-sack. A surgeon who can apply a strong antiseptic to the little wound need not be so careful. I was operated on in Guatemala by the surgeon at the small but beautifully-appointed American hospital. A day later my travelling companion also went to him. We attributed these gifts to Barrios, but now felt that we had paid our footing in Central America.

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This was by no means our last experience of *niguas*.

The modern city was only founded in 1775. Guatemala Antigua, once the splendid seat of Spanish power, and still the capital of the province Sacapequez, was overwhelmed in 1774 by mud from the lofty volcano Agua. It seems that this *volcan* contained a huge quantity of water or vomited it from the depths, which swept with millions of tons of mud upon the palaces, churches and convents of the city, of which now few relics remain. If it was rash to found Antigua under a volcano nearly fourteen thousand feet in height, those who chose the place showed some artistic appreciation of landscape. Antigua is the one thing which Guatemala desires to show the visitor. "Have you been to Antigua?" and, if you have not, "When will you go?" We went there in a car with Sawyer and Mademoiselle Petit, for Doña Clara de Sawyer (this is the usual way of naming married ladies) felt unable to take the athletic exercise of doing thirty miles in a car on the perilous and fatiguing switchback known as the Antigua Road. There *are* roads in Central America which deserve the name, but the tracks called *caminos* or roads are as a rule collections of pot-holes and also of *camillones*, or heights and hollows caused by constant mule traffic, which demand endurance in the traveller and immense elasticity in back-axles and the human spine. But as we climbed

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the hills which lie between the old and new cities the air was keen and splendid, and the views of the plain on which New Guatemala smouldered and glittered below us were very beautiful. Agua lay ahead of us. Pacaya was on our right, and between the two rose the twin peaks of El Fuego and Acatengo. The whole narrow expanse of Central America is not only an earthquake line but a complex of volcanoes, some in continuous activity, some merely "smoking a pipe," and others, long quiescent, which at any moment may bring disaster to a smiling and careless land.

On the road we passed some Indian villages and many Indian packmen or *cargadores*. These men carry great weights. Their endurance is incredible; their reward a scanty living, but doubtless, for such is the nature of man, a sense of freedom. They present some curious problems to those interested in physiology and pathology, and therefore in occupational disorders. It seemed impossible at first to believe that, when their packs are empty and they set out to refill them, the loss of the weight to which they are accustomed renders them so uncomfortable that they put stones in the pack to replace what they carried. This, however, appears to be no legend or invention, but an absolute fact. Those who have studied the nature of bone, and the way it is moulded to stress, know that any continued motion or attitude alters what we call

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normality. Sir Arbuthnot Lane has made a special study of these changes, and has written on the subject. Cobblers, squatting tailors, brewers' men and all accustomed to carrying heavy weights have their joints and spinal vertebræ altered and changed to new forms. These packmen's vertebræ are moulded to their occupations : they have true balance only when loaded. Without a burden they are uncomfortable, to say the least of it. I may remark that I myself during many years when working in Australia and America lifted and carried very heavy weights. It was only during the last three years that I discovered, on being photographed under X-rays, that my own lumbar vertebræ were in a condition from which an anatomist might have deduced something about my early life. I am the more ready to believe what I was told of these labourers of the road.

I shall not attempt to describe Antigua Guatemala. It has a beautiful *lavadero* in which the women wash and bathe, and some of the conventional ruins are interesting architecturally. The Spaniards of those days seem to have built for posterity, even for eternity. In the crypt of one great convent I was for a moment puzzled to discover whether some great piers and vaults were built or carved out of native rock. Their solidity was impressive : they preserved simplicity and discovered power. In little architecture of to-day can we

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discern power : in few books on the great art have I found any adequate analysis of it, or even a fine appreciation. But want of power is now the lack in all modern arts. Our sculpture is empty and banal : our buildings mostly trivial, false, academic. False construction, and ornament that springs not from construction but from the mind, or the sketch-book of one to whom ornament is mere addition, are to be found everywhere. Those who seek power are now feeble folk, they base it on falsehood. In New York I have seen granite carved into a coiled cable that made me feel the great building was founded on hemp and would presently fall about my ears : in London one sees huge columns apparently supported by plate-glass. In that crypt of Antigua I had at least a moment of satisfaction as I thought of the old forgotten architect and his buried achievement. He must have had his hour of triumph. I could imagine him smiling in that deep vault with his hand laid on the vast supporting pier.

The Spaniards had ideas of architecture : in a race half-subdued by Arabians Oriental influences showed themselves in stone. They learned to avoid the noonday sun and to use its shadows, for the use of shadow is so great a part of noble building. They became, too, familiar with the inner court, or *patio*, and its palms and other plants ; with the *azotea*, or flat roof, on which the evening breezes and distant views could be enjoyed when the day declined.

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The *Conquistadores* brought these to America, and built for posterity on an insecure foundation. The firm earth shook and cities vanished. Few indeed of the great era remain. Their descendants have lost the art, and have learned that a cathedral may be the creature of a day. They name their volcanoes after saints, as though they put the saints in charge. But they are helpless or careless saints, and do not chain earthquakes or fire or mud. Buildings now are evanescent, artless and banal. In San Salvador twin church steeples are of riveted white-painted tin. Stone reaching to the skies is fated to disaster. And most of the educated men never enter a church. They call the priests *sopilotes*, or black buzzards. Many of them are indeed ignorant and gross. The imported Italian priest is the most respected. I saw one or two fine Italian types : the rest in appearance were on a level with their grosser Irish colleagues.

A fashionable wedding in Central America throws a great, almost a farcical light, on the way the Church is regarded by the educated. None but the bridegroom and his supporters and the father and brothers of the bride remain for the service. Yet the church still holds the women, and all the feminine friends of the families must be escorted to the building in which the wedding is celebrated. For rich families a bishop is almost a necessity. He is secured by a fee running to thousands of dollars.

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What an archbishop would cost is beyond computation and my knowledge. But even purple-robed members of the hierarchy do not tempt the young men, or the old, to remain for the service. They take in the ladies and retire from the church to the nearest restaurant or club, and there, smoking and drinking, await a message to say that the bridal benediction is being pronounced. As the ladies rise to look for their cavaliers these again enter the church, offer their arms, and escort their charges in a procession to the bridal feast.

In many places the lowest fee for a marriage is sixteen dollars. Often the poor cannot afford this, and do without marriage. Illegitimacy in Central America is almost the rule with the poor. Perhaps the women prefer the system : it gives them more liberty : the children are their own. I asked in one house where the husband of the housekeeper was. "I never heard there was one," was the reply. A sweet little girl who was a sunbeam for us all was accounted for by a rare visitor who sometimes came to see the child but displayed no interest in the mother. He doubtless had another family or even families.

I may remark that in a country where such decent and orderly "immorality" calls for no particular remark or condemnation any visible horror in the streets is as rare as it is lamentably frequent in Europe. We are "moral" at a high price indeed.

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From such “goodness” spring degradations, insanities, and things not to be named.

How little one may learn of a country like Guatemala I saw not only in myself after a few days, but in many who had been there for years. In my old days of travel, when I earned my living as I went by any tool that came to my hand, I observed nothing purposely and learnt much. Now I wonder how it is that travel-books are made, and what their value may be. It seemed to me that a good sub-title for this volume would be “A Strictly Inaccurate Account of Wanderings in Central America.” I observed much, and it may be learned little. After all, those who do not live in the native life and atmosphere of a country can but offer suggestions. They see and do not understand: they grow certain of what is wrong and peer through prejudices at things which require clear vision. I say so much to account humbly for getting down so little of Guatemala. It seems that the proper way to write travel-books is to read everything written on the country visited, and to make a judicious use of the books consulted. I read nothing about Central America till I got there, and very little then. *Mea culpa!* Those who do not take such opportunities remain poor but honest.





## CHAPTER VI

### THE PACIFIC COAST

Cockroaches and *cuerduros*. The British Consul. The Guatemala English Legation House. A diplomatic quarrel. To Escuintla. Amatitlan. The Pacific. At Escuintla. Iguanas. *El tierra caliente*. Manners. A diplomatic bag. The s.s *Columbia*. Chinese musicians. Jazz. On Americans. The coast-line. Mad Europe.

THOSE who so gladly supplied me with wrong information about steamers on the Pacific coast came forward again in about eight days and proffered what I had learnt to look on as a kind of hypothesis as regards a vessel called the *Columbia*, then on her way south from San Francisco. On a certain day this vessel would be at San José de Guatemala. "Is that certain?" "No, señor, not absolutely certain, but highly probable." Central American logic is the logic of persuasion, of noble rhetoric. There is an architectonic splendour in the constructions built on happy chance. My friends were urgent in advising me to get down to San José as soon as possible. Vessels were (very occasionally) a day early. And if they were late, why, there was the hotel!

In my abandoned youth I often slept, like Sam Weller, wherever I could. Anything dry without

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ants or worse in it was as good as a bed. After months of a hard piece of luck I indeed found a soft bed and sheets not to be slept in, and amazed an Australian chambermaid by camping in blankets on the bare floor. But the years alter things. I might not have read much about Central America, but I knew the odour and savour of Spanish *fondas*. Besides, there was the hotel at Barrios. I shivered, not wholly for myself, at the prospect of the San José *fonda*. I must not libel it, and will only say that no one recommended it. Besides possibilities not to be hinted at, for I cannot print the lavatory notices found even in the best hotels, there might be vermin there beyond the swift and feathery cockroach. There are such things as *cuerduros*, big, flat, flea-like devils that bite viciously and are hard to kill, as their name indicates. And then (I began to own this to myself) I was not “so young as I used to be !”

Friends now told me of an English official down at San José. He was a man who would, it seemed, do anything for anyone. He might put us up for the night if the *Columbia* failed in faith to the true time-table. This was helpful indeed, but, after all, only what was to be expected. In all wilder or less-known parts of the world there is almost always someone of British or American nationality ready to lend the stranger a hand. If not, there is one who talks English. When in trouble at Sacatecoluca,

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Salvador, I stood up in a crowd and asked at large if anyone spoke English. It was a good opportunity for a railroad conductor, who had been in California and had acquired the "lingo" and accents of the Pacific slope. But now at San José there would be a real Englishman, for whom I had a message and a sacred charge.

I had made the acquaintance in Guatemala City of Mr. Easton, the British Consul, who occupied the Legation House now vacant of an accredited Minister. Mr. Easton asked me to take a diplomatic bag to San José, and I agreed to play the part of a humble King's Messenger. The house of the Legation is in some ways the most remarkable building I ever entered. It belonged, or belongs, to someone with a morbid thirst for decoration and a mixed barbaric taste. The house itself is pseudo-Arabic or Moresco, but Guatemalan Moresco, and of jazz-construction. The rooms are large: they have barbarous wooden screens, and one wall is painted after the manner of the poorer Italian albergo. Inelegant female figures sprawl in crude colours, and opposite to them is something meant to be a Louis Quinze decoration. That was followed by a wall done after the lowest Teutonic manner. It is said that the owner took everyone's suggestion, even the comic suggestions of someone who thought that here was a chance to see how awful a house *could* be made to look. When there I was glad to

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go up to the azotea, for even the patio, or inner court, was on one side a devilish parody of Granada opposed by bastard Greek caryatides ; while a third wall was decorated with pilasters with painted false doors between them. But the view from the roof paid even for these shocks. From it one sees the whole city spread out upon its plain and the distant mountains, Agua, Pacaya, El Fuego and Acatengo.

Though Guatemala is the largest and most important of the Central American republics, it has now no British Minister. A not uncharacteristic Central American intrigue against the last holder of the office resulted in his withdrawal by the Foreign Office. The dislike of priests and priest-craft among those who nickname them sopilotes and do not receive their political support led to the assertion, probably unfounded, that the minister's wife, an ardent Catholic, mingled politics with her religion. The Minister himself was accused, so I understand, of assaulting or interfering with one of the police. The British Government was informed that their representative was no longer a *persona grata* in Guatemala. He will not be replaced, it may be supposed, till Guatemala apologises or signifies in some face-saving way that it is at last sorry it spoke. The chief Guatemalteco of this little drama was later appointed to a European diplomatic post. He desired to visit London, and was refused the

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usual diplomatic passport. Putting his pride in his pocket he applied for an ordinary one, and could not get that.

We left the city early in the morning. The main line runs to Escuintla, and from there to Mexico and the United States. It is thus possible to get to Guatemala City by train from New York. It will soon be possible to go farther. When the Zacapa-Santa Ana line is put through the rail will continue right to La Union. The notion is to put it through Nicaragua and Costa Rica to Panama. It is a Pan-American notion and said to be strategic. In any case it is another example of peaceful penetration. From Escuintla a branch line plunges down the steep escarpments of the *tierra templada* to the flat and fevered coast zone, the fertile *tierra caliente*. Soon after leaving Guatemala, which we did in company with Doña Clara and Mlle. Petit, who came with us to Escuintla, we passed the lake of Amatitlan, a splendid stretch of water in what must once have been a crater. It is as favourite a resort of the Guatemalteco as Antigua itself. The mountains behind the lake are sunburnt and barren, the waters warm. The lake is some nine miles long and about three wide. It should not be confused with Atitlan, a still bigger lake to the west-north-west of the city. The railroad is a remarkable piece of engineering as it finds its way down a narrow pass with El Agua threatening it on the north.

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The rail runs in complicated S-curves, perpetually doubling back upon itself. In places it reminded me of the Tehachapi Pass on the Southern Pacific in California. We were often in grateful shadow and the sun was not yet doing its worst, though we had left the cooler uplands behind. And suddenly, in a gap of the hills, we saw the faint blue mist of the Pacific, the first sight of which cannot be recalled by any with imagination without a strange renewed thrill. I thought of my own first view of it from the lonely summit of the Californian Coast Range, when I sat, poor and hungry, but enthralled, on a seat of rock and remembered Balboa. I pointed out the new ocean to N. as if I owned it. Well, we own our memories, and sometimes they are bigger and grander than the sight re-seen in after years.

At Escuintla our two companions were to stay for a return train to the city. The wait for our train to the coast gave us time to eat something. In Central America eating is a more important business than some of the meals supplied might seem to indicate. My own habit is to do without lunch if possible. Our customs are time-wasting : a splendid day gets cut in two by lunch, or into three by tea. This is merely habit. Hippocrates recommended one meal a day, though he allowed two in case of illness. With such customs leisure is possible and that peace of mind which permits contemplation. It seems that Æschylus and

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Pheidias cannot have believed dissolution inevitable if they missed five meals a day. But Europeans now over-eat themselves, and cram business and art into intervals between food. In Central America it is the same. We took lunch at Escuintla and saw the market-place afterwards, with its crowds of half-Indian women in their coloured garments standing by piles of golden oranges, mangoes, nisperas, papayas, and many fruits I could not name or remember. I think I have said that these people are mostly kindly. They are not always so. Here for the first time we saw wretched live iguanas exposed for sale as food, with their limbs dislocated to prevent them escaping. An iguana, however, has no soul and therefore cannot feel. If any touch of compunction visits the seller of these big lizards such a sound old Catholic doctrine must comfort him, so long as he does not know that it was supported by the very doubtfully orthodox Descartes. My own movements and comfort were hampered in another way, for over my arm I carried that diplomatic bag with its strange eyelet holes. It weighed little, but it burdened my mind. If I lost it there might not be war, but someone would get a wiggling.

At last the time came for us to say good-bye to our friends, whose homeward train left after ours. In a strange land such partings from those who have helped the stranger are always melancholy.

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It suddenly occurred to me that ever since we left Tela we had at least passed on from one acquaintance to another. Now we waved adieu and cried "adios" to real friends, and plunged downward into the unknown and into the *tierra caliente*. It was a miserable enough journey. Hourly the heat grew worse and the train more crowded. It was an interesting crowd assuredly, but one's interest may be aroused by manners which, in Dickens' phrase, "would sicken a scavenger." There is no equivalent in Guatemala for our "do not spit. Penalty 40s.," and just in front of me sat a respectable looking old native woman, travelling as nurse with a family, who spat on the floor so regularly that I could soon foretell the moment at which to expect it, and therefore watched her with the same attention with which, upon some white night, one awaits the recurring bark of a dog who appears to bark according to time-table. It was impossible to change seats; we sat and sweltered, and my young companion gritted her teeth, being determined not to complain. Knowing or guessing that such discomforts, physical or mental, might be trifles to what we must yet endure the farther we reached out into the comparatively unknown, I was glad to note this. Discomfort is doubled by complaint and halved by endurance. To have a companion in mere travel or in the greatest adventure and suffering who has no humour and grumbles is to learn the

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truth of the Italian proverb, "*Chi ha compagno ha padrone.*"

We were soon down in the stifling lowlands, and the view disappeared in mere bush, here and there variegated by clumps of bananas or palms. We saw no more of the Pacific, since it lay ahead of us. I smoked perpetual black Honduranian cigarettes and grew thirsty. And then at last we ran into the station of San José de Guatemala, near the old deserted roadstead Istapa. As the train stopped I looked out, and from his description recognised the Vice-Consul of the port to whom the sealed bag was consigned. I hastened to get rid of it, and hoped, since we were the only English people there, that the consignee might help us to shorten the tedious process of getting aboard the *Columbia*, which I saw lying at anchor in the roadstead. But there were two Americans on board the train, a doctor and his wife. The grateful consignee of the bag directed me vaguely to the office of the *Commandante*, where passports had to be shown and fees paid for the privilege of leaving Guatemala, and then devoted himself to the Americans, whom he took on board the steamer in a special little launch. So we sat and sweltered for two hours at the head of the jetty, waiting for baggage, all of which was examined by the officials of the Aduana before it went on board. Why this was done I cannot say. I never saw it done elsewhere. It is bad enough to have one's

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things examined on entering a country, but to examine them again on leaving adds a new terror to travel.

Being put on board at San José is a test of patience, and to some a test of courage, especially if there is any sea on. Passengers, some six at a time, are crushed into a sort of cage, which is hooked to a crane and lowered into a big barge. Some of the women squealed, but most took their medicine meekly as we stood crowded together in discomfort with cargo and baggage. Luckily the sea was as calm as it must have been when it was first named the Pacific. Had there been a heavy ground-swell with that blazing sun there would have been a pretty heavy "general average" among us. After a long wait we were towed seaward by a tug and hoisted on board by a cargo derrick in another cage.

It was a relief to get aboard that steamship, one of the best that serve the coast. She was American and clean, her white paint shone. Some of the coast boats are hardly what they should be, so the *Columbia* deserves a good word. Her crew were largely Chinese, many of them born in California, and therefore, I suppose, American citizens. The *Columbia* even boasted a band ; the musicians were also Chinamen, and played instruments with a disregard of tune which was absolute torture to any with a musical ear. One of our best-known English writers, in the early days when he was a musical

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critic, declared that a certain orchestra appeared to play upon a collection of instruments "which possessed no property in common but the peculiarity of having been purchased in a pawnshop." Where the *Columbia's* came from it is impossible to say. I can say where they would have gone to if I had been left alone with them on the boat-deck in the middle-watch. It was astounding to see apparently normal people dancing to such a noise. But Americans cannot as a rule be musical or they would not make jazz discords their national music. One American lady in Guatemala grew quite hot with me because I did not like it. I believe she thought I was "putting on frills," and merely meant to be "superior." It is possible that the Chinese cannot take to or understand the European scale, but as their own seems to deal with very small intervals they might at least be expected to know when a stringed instrument is more or less in tune. Chinese music is not unpleasant to hear, at least I found it interesting when played to me in California by an old Chinese cook with a passion for an old three-stringed mandolin.

We were supposed to sail at midnight for Acajutla in Salvador, and in the morning of the second day to reach our destination, La Libertad, where I hoped to be met by Gasteazoro. We had cabins allotted to us fairly quickly, for old experience sent me hot-foot to the purser's cabin as soon as I got

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on board. The head steward was a very cheerful person, who took me by the arm in a most friendly way after a far too common American manner, and afterwards invited me to have a cocktail with him. I had to refuse, but did not put on any "frills" about it. The reason that so many English people do not get on with Americans is simply that they do not know how to treat them. There are many classes in America, but infinitely less class feeling than in England, and every American resents at once any assumption of superiority or even aloofness. No man with a sense of humour can show such a feeling, and the one thing which appeals to Americans always and everywhere is humour.

The view from the steamer's boat-deck was very beautiful as we lay at anchor and watched the sunlight fade from the land, while long strings of the American marine pelican (*P. fuscus*) flew homeward. From San José the chief volcanic mountains to be seen are Tajamulco, El Fuego and Acatengo, which are really the two summits of one great volcano, El Agua and Pacaya. Few of their heights seem to have been accurately determined, but Agua is over 13,000 feet and Fuego over 14,000. Other volcanoes can be seen, and Isalco behind Acajutla is often active. These heights make splendid landmarks. The coast is often so low-lying and so free of features that the ports without these leading marks would be difficult to distinguish one from





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another. We were now in the height of the fine season on the coast. In California the fine weather lasts from May to October. Here that is the season of heavy gales from the west and south-west with much thunder and lightning. There are often hurricanes farther north, off the coast of Mexico. One hurricane expected about the 4th October, which is San Francisco's Day, is called *El Cordonazo de San Francisco*, "The Whip of Saint Francis."

As the evening fell and the burning brick-red sun of continuous fine weather sank in the west, Agua and Fuego and Acatengo shone splendidly over the land. They were rose-pink and gold with a clear translucent sky behind them and at their bases dark blue shadows climbed swiftly. At last there was but a fleck, as it were, of heavenly fire upon the high summit of Fuego, and then the whole world turned to delicate greys, with the tropic night sky bright with stars. The few lights of San José sparkled in the darkness and were reflected in the quiet, silent sea. At last it seemed that we had indeed left Europe behind us. For the time, at least, I was heartily glad of it.

For getting away from Europe was like leaving a madhouse. To see poor idiots gibber and giggle, to hear maniacs with flushed faces rave on one dreadful line of terrible thought, to watch melancholiacs marching round and round with such awful faces that one's heart sinks at beholding them,

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and then to leave them for some poor exalted devil who is an apostle, or Christ, or some emperor, and turn from him to find at one's elbow a crazy altruist with a wonderful scheme for making the earth a paradise, is indeed depressing. But what of Europe now? In it are there not examples of every kind of madness? We leave the asylum and go back into the saner world of one's own circle, and in time forget our hours in the hell of the broken-hearted and broken-minded. But in Europe there is no escape for us. So long as we are anchored there we are of the company of the mad. When I left it behind me it still followed. I dreamed in a world of passionate and foolish unrest. Madmen, called politicians and statesmen, jibbered plans and policies, and other madmen applauded or hooted or produced prospectuses of an immediate paradise from their crammed pouches. All men were prating or howling of their rights; and in a world where "rights" are the chief, the only thing, there is neither rest nor peace nor the true possibility of big and happy work. Evil is the case of the ship where men think merely of what is due to them, evil the case of the unhappy state or continent. Nations howled for their rights, nationalities arose and screamed for justice, fools rose to the surface like froth and none could skim the scum from the pot. The rich clung to their riches, the powerful to their power; they clutched their cash but had

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no foresight. Everyone was on strike, not only those who laboured many hours at bitter or repugnant labour ; everyone screamed for "more" and still more, and lived in terror of less. Wisdom seemed gone out of the earth and duty departed with her. I saw the world raving and lived in a madhouse, and everyone I knew came to me or others with anodynes or panaceas. They lived in fear and the exaltation of a poisoned intellect.

And now as the sun went down over the Pacific and the after-glow lingered on the heights of Acatengo a little peace came back, even though I knew that the republics from which the land breeze came to us were volcanic and might erupt in revolution at any hour. There was here no vast, insane crowd ; there was room for all, and if disaster arose presently someone came who, robber though he might be, was determined on peace. And among the main portion of the people there was yet some simplicity ; they were children of the soil and still near it. My own people were divorced from the earth and the land ; they pullulated in swarms far from the sources of fertility, and having lost touch with Nature knew not what they wanted. Among these people of Europe there was no source of power, none of authority ; restraint, which is the source of power and its origin, had failed. I felt that any man, not wholly as mad as his fellows,

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might pine at last for an Akbar, or Genghis Khan or Attila himself.

But for some days, even some months, I was to shake the dust of Europe from my feet and forget its tumults and its clamours. Are these things out of their place and order in any record of travel ? I think they are not. From heights and great distances we can see the world arena clearly and perhaps learn thereby.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SALVADORANIANS

Leaving San José. Acajutla. Sharks. La Libertad. Dr. Gasteazoro. *Que tal, hombre!* Roads. Doña Eva. Q.B.S.P. *La Casa de Salud.* San Salvador. Yellow fever. *Gringos.* Political caution. "Soft" Spanish. Types of women. Morality. Tale of the sewing-machine.

THE *Columbia* was to sail immediately. She was to sail at nine o'clock. She was to sail at midnight. We were still in the land of mañana, the country of "Quien sabe?" and "menos los mulos." I was, therefore, not surprised to find on looking out of my porthole in the very early dawn that we still lay off San José, with Agua almost due north. Even Americans cannot resist the atmosphere of the world they live in, though, indeed, their reputation for being such tremendous men of business rests mainly on the persistence with which they assert it. They will exhaust half an hour in explaining volubly that they have not ten minutes to give you. They show the greatest decision in saying they cannot decide. They take a thing up to drop it and seize something else too hot to hold. They are delightful companions, and I would rather do business with an Englishman who knows nothing but his mind, but does know that. It is better to

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have a project turned down at once than to have it hung up to rot, while the genial hunter considers other carcases. I found it impossible to be on board an American steamer without thinking of Americans. I like and admire them tremendously, but consider that, like Englishmen, they have weaknesses, even faults. I think it may be noted that those who travel and say they do not like Americans are merely misinterpreting their general dislike for strangers. Do we not dislike all whom we do not know?

The *Columbia* hove up her mud-hook before breakfast and the bearings of Agua soon altered. We reached Acajutla about noon and again anchored off a jetty. In one sense this roadstead and town are English. English capital built the rail to Santa Ana, the chief business city of Salvador. English merchants run the business. It is the kind of place that nothing but business with profits, and those not small, could induce any to live in, though part at least of the town is not on the flat shore but on a "bluff." Behind the town there are higher lands : beyond them Isalco, a volcano never wholly quiescent. Twelve miles inland is the town of Sonsonate.

We put some passengers ashore and took in some cargo for coast ports. I was glad to point out to N. two ferociously active ten-foot sharks engaged in hunting a shoal of fish within a few

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fathoms of the *Columbia*. It is difficult to make the inexperienced believe in sharks if they have a passion for sea-bathing. Local people often minimise the risks run, for they mostly bathe in numbers and in known places, whereas the stranger who has never seen so much as a shark's triangular fin is apt to go in anywhere. The actual sight of one is an argument apt to convince those who are not idiots. It is a good thing to get rid of fools, but unluckily there are not sufficient eaten by Carcharias to raise the standard of human wisdom.

We left Acajutla without regret, and late next afternoon dropped anchor off La Libertad. This port's great leading mark is the *volcan* San Salvador, 6,000 feet in height, which is close to the city and was only lately in a violent eruption that destroyed part of the railroad. This port again is an open roadstead and much exposed in bad weather. Here I expected to be met by my friendly doctor, José de Gasteazoro, and possibly his friend, a late acquaintance of mine, William Levy, a San Salvador merchant, with a happy passion for good books, who still lamented, as many do, the loss of a true poet in his family. For Amy Levy is not forgotten, though she died so young. Gasteazoro and I had exchanged telegrams when I was in Guatemala. All I dreaded was *menos los mulos*. Perhaps his car had broken down on the road from the city. I had learnt some of the possibilities and impossibilities

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of those Central American unfinished switchbacks they call roads and did not know that the way to San Salvador from La Libertad was the pride of the republic.

Again we were derricked and dumped into a barge and presently hauled alongside the wharf. I looked up and saw Gasteazoro, a little older, but still the "Angel of St. Moritz." With him was Levy and between them a lady, whom I guessed to be Doña Eva de Gasteazoro, my old friend's wife. We exchanged greetings in English and Spanish : "Hallo, old chap !" and "Que tal, hombre ?" In a few minutes we were once more bucketed and landed on the wharf. To get to friends in so far a country is like coming home, and I felt like Bunyan's Christian when his pack dropped off. If my friends were half as glad to see us as I was to see them they had little of which to complain.

Gasteazoro is known in Salvador from the City to Chalatanango, from Santa Ana to La Union. To be his friend made the Customs easy, or so I fancy. In a very little while we were in the car and climbing a curving but clean and sound road. But Salvador's pride in it was sufficient proof that such a road was rare. On the way up to the city, which is over two thousand feet above the sea, we talked of everything on earth, and Gasteazoro and I chuckled over our memories of St. Moritz. Doña

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Eva knew some English, but was gently shy of using it. She and N. mangled two languages quite happily, and I was glad to hope that I had not instantly been set down among the ranks of a man's friends who may do very well for a bachelor but are scarcely desirable for a sober married man. It is said that we rarely like our friends' wives. The truth is that they rarely like us, and, concealing it from everything but our intuitions, establish little by little an armed neutrality which waits for us to make the first mistake. In the end we make one, since any stick is good enough to beat a poor dog with. Doña Eva was by birth a Nicarguense, and so was her husband, though he had become a citizen of the world. It may be merely fortune, but so far I have never found a Nicaraguan anything but charming. It is a Spanish custom to end a letter even to men, with q.b.s.m., or "Que besé sus manos," "Who kisses your hands." For ladies the cadenza of the epistle is q.b.s.p., "Who kisses your feet." Many of them deserve any homage. We were destined to find out how kindly a heart beat in our gentle hostess.

It had been arranged that we were not to stay in our host's own full house, but in a spacious and airy *Casa de Salud*, or nursing home, which his fine obstinacy had established in spite of a thousand difficulties. He, at least, did not always bow before the doctrine of *mañana*, and sometimes took as his motto, "Do it now." The city hospital was not

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without merit, but the richer classes had no place in which to lie up in comfort with first-class nursing. Nursing in Central America is carried on by nuns, who have often more concern for their patients' souls than for their safety. They appear to know more of heaven than of hygiene or asepsis. It may be eternally better to let a man die after confession and absolution than to permit him to accumulate sins and die later perhaps in a place without a priest. Gasteazoro had, however, procured two trained English nurses, one from "Barts" the other from the London. For a few days these were to look after us until we all started for Cosigüina, Gasteazoro's big ranch in Nicaragua, our final and desired destination. Ever since reading Belt's book on that country, its fauna, avifauna and insect life, I had desired to see it. Opportunities for observation in Honduras and Guatemala had been confined more or less to cock-roaches and *niguas*. Now we were to visit a land of alligators, macaws, the strangest ants, and, possibly, even a jaguar.

Though the splendid road from La Libertad ended in the highly irregular pavements of the city, which yet waits the application of allotted funds for its streets, San Salvador is almost at once attractive. It lacks the cold length and breadth of Guatemala. Its welcome is warm as the genial climate. It is not spread out endlessly upon a plain; it lies among

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hills, and part rises on a slope towards its big volcano. Not many of the buildings are more than one story high, except in the official and business quarters, but in all its ways there is a busy and, as it seems to me, a not unhappy people. They did not appear to resent gringos ; they smile easily, and one does not see, in spite of poverty, that European look of anxiety upon their brown faces. But there is always less anxiety in sunlight than in the mists of the north. We who live without the direct help of the sun are truly underfed, for all our wealth and smoke. There is such a thing as light starvation, and we begin to know it at long last. There is none in Salvador. It was convenient to adopt the native custom at once and take to bed during the siesta or hot time of the day. I slept with open windows and took no notice of a few mosquitoes. There was no malaria about, and yellow fever had for a time at least been banished from the city through the work of a Dr. Bailey, sent there from an institute founded by the protagonist of the Standard Oil Trust. His later achievements at least deserve recognition, though the origins of the Trust have been somewhat severely criticised by certain people who apparently do not understand "business." If their estate is the more gracious and their opinions more idealistic than those which "cut ice" or make oil they may own that some amends have been made by the subjects of their attack. It was said of an

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old millionaire in America who built a highly expensive church that it was "the biggest fire-insurance" on record. Something of the same kind may be said of other constructions. In any case San Salvador has benefited, and I used no mosquito curtains to guard against the *stegomyia fasciata* and yellow fever. Yet not long after we left it finally there were a few cases of fever and a mighty run on mosquito nets.

I look back on our first days in the city as a kind of dream. A more bright, alive, undream-like place cannot be imagined, but to find myself in a nursing home with English nurses at hand without the gloomy excitement of an impending operation made my world fantastic. Yet how convenient it was to have everything handy, including a sunny operating theatre! When I thought of all my *Changuinola* friends' gloomy prognostications and affecting farewells to the rash fool who actually dared the perils of the land, it was comforting to have a doctor for a friend, and to be in the position of a patient without any immediate reason for considering myself one. I was even then recovering from the last operation, and my medical history was as full of disasters as *The Decline and Fall of Rome*. Amiable physicians looked over it, and suggested pleasantly that as nothing appeared to be able to kill me naturally I might look forward to being hanged. However, Salvador exercised its

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lenient arts upon me. In a temperature of 80° life and its functions go easily. Even the word *mañana* soon failed to arouse thoughts of immediate manslaughter. To come to a land where it is more or less "always afternoon" is a relief after long years in an absurd country such as England, where everything seems to matter. If these reflections appear alien from casual notes of travel it may be pleaded that to travel abroad with subjective discoveries is to waste the greater part of one's time. All autobiography is travel, even if on the lines of Mandeville or Munchausen, and every book of travel is autobiography.

Luckily for us our nursing home was doing a slack business at this time. A young athletic American surveyor working on the survey of the new line from Santa Ana and Zacapa, who had shot himself accidentally, but not very seriously, was X-rayed and operated upon. It is difficult in a book like this to speak frankly of the people one met. A chaffing allusion to a man I knew in a far country once brought me an angry letter saying that I spoke of people as if they were savages. But I see no more reason for ignoring an interesting or charming character than of neglecting some custom or feature of the world one visits. This young surveyor's wife was like a sunbeam in the nursing home. She had been everywhere in that varied western world and was full of stories and humour.

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Tiny in physique, but a real athlete for all that, she enjoyed life for ever, even when, in the wildest bush and among wild enough workers, she carried a revolver in her belt. She dressed there like a boy and looked so much like an attractive youth that young señoritas in the wilds fell into the trap and endeavoured to make themselves charming in her eyes.

Many exiled gringos came to the *Casa de Salud* about tea-time or in the evenings. We sat in the patio as the sunlight fell on a fiery mass of flame-flowers on the eastern wall, or as shadows deepened when the sun went down. Among the visitors was the British attaché who did what diplomatic business there was in Salvador : a keen American, who was the American agent for those who made the last loan to Salvador, about which I may speak later, and many men of business and their wives. Sometimes there was a little music : sometimes the gramophone. This dreadful instrument, for mostly it *is* dreadful, may teach or drive some in the end to real music, but those with any real feeling for music it mostly drives to despair, and sometimes to bed. We talked of all things, even politics. Those who knew nothing of politics talked freely. Those who knew much or even a little were more cautious. In countries where force is not mediate and a last resort, but immediate and largely independent of any law but that of the reigning tyrant, discretion is best. I learnt much of politics, but little from

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those who were known to know me. Casual intelligent strangers in trains and hotels opened more to me than my friends. This is why it is impossible to give authorities for things one knows to be true. A chance word may ruin a career or a business. With the law so open to influence or bribery life is venturesome at its best. Yet I think some enjoy the gamble, and things may be as broad as they are long. Those in power may be friendly, and perhaps, when it comes to bribery, you may bribe highest and get the verdict. If Americans do well in Central America it may be that they understand graft better than others. It does not raise their hackles and make them growl : they were born to its methods and have little sense of law. In the end law is based on a recognised community of interests : in one sense it is strongest in the ancient tribe and remains strong where tribal laws, however disguised, retain their hold. But there is as yet no true American "tribe," for Americans are as pure individualists as life permits to exist.

I have said little of my chief friend here because I shall have much to say of him and his later when we reach Nicaragua. While in San Salvador he arranged a dinner in honour of "an illustrious traveller and author," as the San Salvador paper put it, whom I forbear to name. There I met many most charming people, Salvadoranians, Americans, and English. One publicist of San

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Salvador was much interested in English literature and had translated Wilde's *Sphinx*. The talk was varied, though never political : it was carried on in English and Spanish alternately. When Spanish is spoken at the rate at which "Swift Camilla scours along the plain" I am left panting in the rear. The Spanish spoken in the Americas is "soft Spanish"; it has no *th* for *c* when followed by *i* or *e*; the final *d*, as in *ciudad*, is omitted and not voiced softly as in the Peninsula. But the *s* which gives Spanish its sibilant character always remains sharp and hard. Though it is a noble and impressive language to read, I cannot agree with those who think it surpasses Italian in beauty. The poorer classes on the whole speak good Spanish, though doubtless they use many Indian and local words.

One of the first things we notice in a new country is the beauty of the women or their want of it. What we see depends much on our mood and what we expect. London is full of loveliness to me when my luck is in; when I am off-colour the women-folk are off-colour also. The dry warm air of Salvador made me expect beauty, and I often found it. If a sense of well-being helps expectation it mitigates ugliness and raises the general standard. Among the *gente del centro*, or aristocracy, I saw some beautiful women and more so charming that a gentle mind and warm heart made one forget any imperfection of colour or form. Among the less

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wealthy, the daughters of small shop-keepers or *artezanos*, the flapper type, with which the war made us too well acquainted in England, is very common. These girls run, or hunt, in couples. Some were as pretty as peaches, and most had fine eyes at the least. Their hair is abundant and mostly black, though here and there are rare signs either of a persistent Visigothic strain or of some intrusive notherner. It is not generally known that some pure Castilians are as fair as the fairest from Norway. Owing doubtless to the heat, the women wash their hair frequently, and some, even of the "aristocracy," often go out afterwards with it hanging in a wild cascade over their shoulders. Loose locks are thus not always a sign of a presumed virginity. Flowing-haired matrons with their children may show themselves, if they will, upon the Plaza, though as a rule the evening parade there is a time for dressed locks and gorgeous apparel. While many are seated on benches listening to the music of a band, or drowning a pianissimo effect with their chatter, the young men in pairs or parties walk round the Plaza in one direction, while the giggling girls march in the other. Thus everyone sees everyone else under the palms and the glittering electric lights and none lingers in obscurity.

If beauty is of perpetual interest, morality, which often has no slender connection with it, seems a subject not to be neglected. Morality is never

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so low as it is reported to be by those who come home with grins or uplifted hands of horror. If we confine morality to the absurdly narrow limits of sexual behaviour, and forget that it should include a general sense of extra-legal and unenforced honourable conduct, many places may be called immoral by those whose standards are different. But I never believe moral aspersions when expressed by Puritans from a cold climate. A Presbyterian opinion of Papeete would leave me as cold as an animadversion on the Hawaiian *hula-hula* by those who carry some modern dances far beyond the confines of decency. It is not that the tropics make all the difference. Some tropical tribes have a savage and rigid sex morality which makes them regard our customs as hideous and damnable license. A missionary married to his cousin might justifiably be speared with his profligate partner by a righteous and wrathful member of an exogamous Australian tribe. No one can foretell what morality will ordain. For a dairyman among the Todas to take his wife into the sacred dairy is an inexpiable crime. If not properly celibate he must leave her while he serves in such a holy office. Before leaving England I was told by a romantic friend, who had certainly been as far as Mexico and therefore assumed that he knew something of the Americas farther south, that in San Salvador morality was at a cheerful and humorously low ebb. To obtain a temporary or

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permanent mistress it was, so he told me, not obligatory to court her. The admitted method was founded on the belief, to which he subscribed, that a sewing-machine was necessary to the life and happiness of every young woman, since without it she could not prepare her trousseau for the correct marriage she looked forward to later. The aspirant for feminine companionship, unhampered by marital ties, therefore bought a sewing-machine, had it carried down to the market, or near it, stood by it a few minutes to be inspected by the passers-by, and then left it with his servant. Mothers of candidates for the machine then interviewed the underling, and having obtained some information as to his master's means, called on the bachelor with a view to business, which a full choice rendered easy. I need hardly say that this pretty legend has about as much foundation as most of the lives of the saints. These charming young Salvadoranians are neither more nor less moral than other people. To say so much is not to strain credibility, unless it be the credibility of the old American lady who objected to a novel in which a man had a mistress on the ground that this could not happen in the United States. If the people themselves are immoral in so often living together without being married it is often due to the priest's charge for marrying them. Such a custom grows apace : in the end mere economics prevent the *sopilote* being asked to officiate.

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To get really accurate information about such things demands more than can be asked of the mere wanderer, who can but be a dealer in impressions. It is naturally the same with politics. My first experience in trying to unravel a knotted skein of this order was in South Africa just before the Boer War. It taught me that one tale meant nothing till twenty were heard, and that when the twenty were compounded into the "truth" I was almost as wise as before. But I had seen Oom Paul on his stoep, sputtering madly of Rhodes and knew that all Africa was sputtering just as madly. Such fits mostly end in mania, and the South African, or at least Johannesburg, maniaco-depressive fit was nearly over. But to give a coherent picture of incipient delirium was beyond me. I left this to able journalists who know everything, or have to pretend they do. Central America is simpler than the African maelstrom, darkened by a desert simoom, but even its script cannot be deciphered with certainty, though the United States writes upon a new Belshazzar's walls, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin."

Still, the task of saying something cannot be shirked, even if what I put down is but the merest personal impression for which I can give no authorities. I shall not refer to books, for I have read few of them, and all I have read must be studied with caution.

## CHAPTER VIII

### "LET US GO TO ILOPANGO"

Political "truth." San Salvador classes. Divisions. Power and blackmail. A President "removed." A political tragedy. Dr. Quinones. Revolution and order. Elections. Ilopango. Earthquakes and politics. At the lake. Life of the people.

If Central America with its five republics, which unite in nothing but a wholesale dread of the United States, does not present quite so tangled a problem as South Africa did at its worst, it certainly offers sufficient problems to make the observer tear his hair. Not even the obscure Hegelian principle of the *Identity of Opposites* can work in the mazes and jungle of contrary political creeds, personal judgments and conflicting interests. It may perhaps be allowed that in these republics one comes across few intentionally false guides if certain people in the offices of obscure but lucrative reward are avoided or mistrusted. Even so the truth is as hard to find as some forgotten Maya monument hidden in a forest wilderness. Some intellectual machete is needed to hew a way. I know of none but the apparently barren principle that people the world over are remarkably alike,

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and that in the end interest dominates all but a few who rarely exercise power. What is truth to one man is falsehood to another as each looks through his own coloured spectacles and damns his opponent's oculist.

The divisions among classes in Salvador, as in other republics, are so very hard and definite that the interests of no two of them coincide. In the city of San Salvador itself there are three main classes, omitting the many sub-divisions : the *gente del centro* or "aristocrats," who live in the centre of the city ; the *mengalas* or *artezanos*, a lower bourgeoisie, who include the poorer traders ; and the *gente del pueblo, jornaleros*, or day labourers, the poorest of all, who usually have more Indian blood in them than the others. These divisions are positive and acute in a way scarcely to be recognised in Europe outside of Prussia before the war. In Europe it is not absurd to suggest that, taken all round, the interests of all classes really coincide. They are physiologically connected ; for one to bleed the other white is to produce general anæmia. In Central America it would be absurd to argue that the immediate interests of the poorer classes are one with those who rule. Something of the Spanish conquest still remains, and conquest and success in economics keep dominance alive in those who are dominant. There is still not a little of the invader and the invaded in these republics,

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though Indian blood runs almost as powerfully in the veins of the riders as in those of the ridden.

Even classes themselves are split, divided, and suspicious. “We are Indians under our skin and remain cautious and suspicious,” said one eminent man to me. He felt the truth of this. Whom should a man trust? Distrust animates them all, for intrigue is for ever working underground; not the intrigue of mere party, but that which may mean ruin and exile. Classes themselves are split by religion. Not families but wives and husbands are divided. The priest rules the women; the men loathe his influence and his uniform. But there is often great family affection, if it might not rather be called adhesion to common familial interest in the face of danger. For ever their minds turn to politics, though they may not be of the political classes and hate them. Wealth depends as much on avoiding official robbery and blackmail as on brains and work. No man of business, landowner, or mine-owner, can ignore those in power. In Arabia the date-palm is the source of wealth: in Central America the “greased” palm is dominant. What, too, is the good of change? “Better the devil we know than the devil we don’t” is a sea-saying. To change is but to seek a method for satisfying a second set of robbers. It is no wonder that a President strong enough to keep his seat is a useful tyrant, unless his greed grows with his

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acquisitions. If that happens, or if he becomes brutal beyond a low public opinion of brutality, he may find his throne was placed on the peak of a volcano.

I do not assert that there are no good Presidents, or those who on the whole are good when we consider the circumstances. But a fairly sound one may go out suddenly if, relying on his power, he forgets that it is bought by allowing others to make money. He may get his knife rashly into methods of public exploitation of which he does not approve. Or he may seek to "compound for the sins he is inclined to" by the Hudibrastic method. He will interfere in business and seek to placate "the public." But the public has no power. Some few years ago a President in one comparatively prosperous republic went too far. He insisted on reforms which threatened dividends. He thought some corporations should carry out their contracts. A revolution or "removal" was secretly subscribed for. His morals were also abused. They may have been good or bad for all I know, but I recollect that in the *Rise of the Greek Epic* Gilbert Murray remarks dryly that when we wish to destroy an enemy we accuse him of sex crimes. None of those who subscribed to get rid of him asked or desired to know the methods of his removal. All that any wished for, more or less openly, was that El Presidente should retire to Paris or London, where

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his American bonds or British investments would enable him to enjoy his leisure. The actual result, however, was the interfering President had his head cloven in two in a public Plaza. One of the conspirators, who was in the President's *entourage*, and just behind him, was surprised, but did not lose his head. He drew his revolver and shot the assassin, a mere hired peon, with a view of removing the man's possible evidence and implication of others. Unluckly for himself he only wounded the murderer, who got away and was arrested later. The party in power, of whom the President was but the main figure, remained in power and did many "removals." Is this account of the tragedy authentic? I should be surprised if everyone admitted that it is. I was told many stories with essential differences. But the core remained the same. The President *did* interfere, and was killed. Mere immorality, even if substantiated, does not outrage corporations. Those who would do business with Nero or Messalina can scarcely endue the robe of Marcus Aurelius.

No one need be a lawyer or an expert in the Law of Evidence to know what most evidence is worth. I feel tempted to remark that nothing I put down can be regarded as absolutely true even if we take no metaphysical view as to absolute "Truth." The only truth is the truth of impressions. Here even Europeans become cautious at last. They

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acquire interests, prejudices, and suspicions. It seems easier to write accurately, or with less fear of contradiction about the lost civilisations between Mexico, Yucatan and Panama. To follow in the footsteps of the *Naturalist in Nicaragua* would be rash, but one might perhaps say something fresh about leaf-cutting ants without making the country too hot to hold him. The anger of an entomologist, though I have known it to be bitter, is nothing to the fury of an interested "patriot."

Nothing said here must be taken to imply that I have actually seen anything which calls for angrier comment than that employed every day by excited English journalists. Since Cabrera fell in Guatemala and showed himself but a pinckbeck Porphyrio Diaz, there is none of the savage cruelty which he, and Diaz and Rosas in the Argentine, employed to secure peace and power. All the same, more than a year ago some people were shot in the city of San Salvador. The accounts given of this political tragedy are varied as the tropical flora, and as extravagant. Six people were shot, sixty were shot, six hundred were shot ! Those who were wounded were dragged out of sight by the police, and murdered and buried in secret ! A mob of cattle goes mad at the sight of the blood shed by one of their fellows. The mere sight of blood makes some faint. In others it arouses and lets loose the imagination. Those who "see red" in

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anger lose their restraint ; to see red in another sense takes away the judgment of many. A tragedy without effusion of blood may have little effect. But blood cries out. Once I shot a horse in California to prevent it dying a lingering death of misery. My own horse, who took little notice of the rifle's report, presently smelt blood and trembled like a leaf. I do not say that this violence in San Salvador could not have been avoided. With a little more wisdom and more decision of character it would have been avoided. It was indeed a political disaster hard to recover from. For the procession fired on was composed of women, many of whom belonged to the *gente del centro*. The President in power and the candidate about to succeed were not nominees of the city. They rather represented, so far as they represented more than themselves and those looking for place, the country outside San Salvador. I believe this procession was at first forbidden and then allowed. Such vacillation is fatal where authority holds its tenure by nothing so much as strength of character. But the actual firing was certainly not of central origin. The collected crowd necessarily had in it elements of disorder. Carrying arms is common, and though those who enter the city were said to have been disarmed, such a process could not be thorough where so many have “guns.” We all carried them when in the country : many carry

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them in the city. Something was thrown at the police ; shots were fired, and men lost their heads. I believe that Dr. Quinones, the President of to-day, regrets nothing so much. Responsibility for it has, of course, been thrown on him ; it would have been thrown on an archangel if any had been close to the actual President. On the whole Quinones now seems to be doing well. Even the city is not so bitter as it was. He is a strong, big, determined-looking man, with a sense of humour. As a practising physician he was regarded as able. He knew his business. And now, whatever his faults, which are the faults largely of a system, he gets things done. Our archangel might not accomplish so much. I remember in New York having a colloquy with a minor light of Tammany, then out of power. He said, " Well, this is the way of it : those other fellows talk about honesty and do nothing for New York. We robbed everybody and did good work with what was left over." In essence he was a sound politician in a very imperfect world.

It may be that when the shooting took place a revolution was desirable. But " *quién sabe?* " Order is also desirable. It always is unless conditions are unendurable, and what the city did not like the country, more or less, supported. Few, if any, disorders arise from those who live on *frijoles* and *tortillas*. The " Have-nots " who start revolutions are never the poor or oppressed : they are merely

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those who feel they have been out of office far too long, and are hounded from the sources of what they have learnt to believe legitimate private supply. Managed elections keep them from power. It must be admitted presidential continuance depends often enough on electoral fraud. There is no ballot, the bulk of the population is practically without letters in the crudest sense. They come to a table where there are armed officials. They give their names and vote, sometimes under stress. But the vote is registered as the man with the roll wills. Districts with a four thousand majority for change have a managed majority of two thousand for none. In the end, unless things get too bad to be borne, and even the President's friends at last grow discontented and desert him, most people of the educated classes satisfy themselves perforce with enforced order. They can at least trade and gamble and dance. They regard the squeals of the "Outs" with contempt. In what would they be better? So they say, "Good, let us have peace and drive to Ilopango or Coatopeque." Politics may be given up as a bad job and King Stork endured till the next political earthquake happens. It may be that so far Communism is hardly a practical danger, though it has undoubtedly affected not a few *artezanos*.

In such countries it is easy to make the authorities suspicious. They think, naturally enough, that the

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whole world depends on their keeping power. But sometimes suspicion leads to comedy. Many years ago Don José invited some friends to hunt with him on Cosigüina. He wrote out a telegram to one of them, and after doing so put a note, "*Mas o menos*," "More or less," on the paper. By this he meant that the other men were to get wires worded in something the same way. He gave the telegram and a list of the names to a distant connection of his. This intelligent man sent the original message to the first name, but to the others nothing but the three words, "*Mas o menos*." The telegraphist carried them to his superior, who shook his head. A committee sat on the messages and sent for the police. As a result of this Don José was called on for an explanation. The messages were cryptic, mysterious. *Mas o menos* might be a political cipher, a kind of fiery cross. It took the owner of harmless Cosigüina some time to convince everyone that he meant harm to nothing but a deer, or perhaps a jaguar. He had no interest in political earthquakes. But in the end everyone laughed and was happy but the ingenuous booby who sent the wires.

This is a land of real earthquakes, and it may be that the very want of certainty in what we call the solid earth affects people's minds. For tomorrow, or this night, they may die in the death-trap of an *adobe* house, or amid the jagged wreck of

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something more pretentious. San Salvador lies under the shadow, and also the threat, of its own special volcano, about 6,000 feet in height, which was last in eruption in 1917, about the time of the last great earthquake. This city is the “swinging cradle,” or hammock city, of the five republics. There are sometimes daily continued shocks. The present absence of minor tremors makes the people apprehensive that such rare peace means but a deferred and greater disaster. Many of them have the notion that the larger the amount of water in Ilopango the greater the danger to the city. They petitioned the President to clear out the channel of the Jiboa and drain some of the water. Naturally enough he laughed at them. But if an earthquake happened with Ilopango at a maximum he might have no reason to smile. Strange that people who can endure tyranny and malversation of public wealth may rise under contempt of some foolish superstition. An insult to a saint might produce anarchy if the saint were popular and not under a cloud. Many are. If they do not answer prayer they may get their pictures turned to the wall. On continued recalcitrancy they are sometimes banished to the least honourable part of the house. A friend of mine once saw a crowd outside a roadside *fonda*, kept by a man he knew who had just brought out and smashed two pictures of his favourite but ineffectual or lazy saint. “That will teach him,”

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he remarked wrathfully. He had the sympathy of many, for the village was just then not in luck.

The *Casa de Salud*, though little furnished with saints, had stood two earthquakes. It is a house of wood, steel and plaster. My bed rose under me only once in ten days, while the whole building creaked. I have no theory to account for earthquakes, but the continued instability of a place like San Salvador suggests that it lies on unstable foundations which are for ever crushing and settling down. At any moment of the day or night folks may be half-naked in the swaying streets and rushing to the open Plaza, while thousands of women scream to the Virgin or their patron saints. Yet, in spite of the subdued feeling of the dangers of a full Ilopango, none seemed to worry about quakes while I was there, or about such cloud-bursts as lately flooded the dry river Asalguate which runs close to the city and filled it with wrecked houses, flood trash and dead bodies. None knew how many died. In our first stay everything was peaceful, the weather supremely beautiful with cool nights and a wonderful crescent moon, "with the old moon in her lap," that lamped the low-built streets and the rickety churches, one with twin towers made of bolted corrugated iron for fear of a disaster, due soon no doubt for all our sins. Politics, too, were quiescent. The President was doing well. He remained cool and cautious. There was some-

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thing not a little humorous, even though possible tragedy underlay the drama, in the way he came to our *Casa* at times when he was free for some minor medical treatment. Our narrow street was cleared by part of his escort, and while some remained under arms at either end the rest brought him to the door. Probably he carries a revolver, though he smiles easily and stands up under his burden. Few need envy a President here. Let him make what hay he will and stack it securely. There were times I thought it much better to be a peon.

But, indeed, after a little while in San Salvador the stranger may easily begin to sympathise with many of his hitherto unknown fellows, even with the kindly *gente del pueblo*. If urgent and anxious Europe haunts him as it has sometimes haunted me he would be glad to forgather with them. To live and gather such fruits as one may, to rise early and do a little work, to sleep during the siesta, and then to listen to the marimba and to eat and make love and sleep again, perhaps seems to them the whole duty of man, after the saints have taken their toll of time. If we are poor and sinful, what of that? Are we not human? "Vaya con Dios, amigo."

We seek for ways of escape from our burdens, rich and poor, or those at some doubtful half-way house. A few days after our arrival in Salvador N. and I went in a car with the Doctor and Doña Eva and "Don Guglielmo," to the ancient volcanic

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lake of Ilopango. Here at the end of 1879 the level of the waters rose four feet. The shallow Jiboa became a raging, powerful torrent. It scooped out a huge channel and the waters fell over thirty feet. Signs of volcanic activity showed themselves ; islands arose ; the water boiled and millions of fish perished and rotted and were burnt for fear of the effluvium causing a pestilence. But once more there is peace in the great water-filled crater, and ducks and moorhens swim in it and boats sail across its fair expanse. While my companions bathed and swam in warm water, which here and there sometimes steamed lightly near the beach, I, far the oldest, sat upon drift of volcanic pumice and forgot to ponder over politics or the strange ways of the strangest of all animals called man, and his folly of hastening to be rich and powerful in the little hour he may doubtfully call his own. It was good to sit by the warm water and to lave one's hands in it, hands that had become so dusty on the pot-holed and preposterous road from the city, and to watch the shadows on the brown opposing hills as the day declined and shafts of level light called out the reds and yellows and violets of the flowering trees of Salvador. Yonder, to the south, rose the cone of the Volcan San Vicente. It at least had not spread destruction in the memory of man, though from its lowest slopes the clean-cut terror of dangerous San Miguel can be seen barring the way

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to the south. After the bathing was over and the shouts of the children in the friendly water had subsided, to rise again when we threw in floating stones of pumice for a little dog to salve, we went back to the shadows of a house, the centre of a *finca*, or farm, that claimed the land about us. There on the verandah, sheltered by climbing plants aflame, we laid out our tea. Which of us then thought of Presidents or revolution, or of life and death? These little things were no more to us than they were to the ducks floating double in the silver of the lake, or to the empurpling shadows of the hills. As these shadows lengthened, and the whole warm world came into one tone, a lean young horseman on a brown mule drove in the calves that for the night were to be parted from their mothers, while women by their outside fires, then beginning to glow in the fall of night, prepared supper for their men, and few birds chattered and piped in the tree-tops or among the flaming blossoms. For once there was no black buzzard, no gaunt flapping sopilote, with bare grey vulturine neck or a red head that looks fresh from blood, within our sight to suggest corruption or death.

The life that these people, half or more than half Indian, lead is not always hard, and surely it has its compensations for those who have not the corruption, or death-seeds, of urgent ambition in their souls. The fruits of the earth come readily ;

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for nine months of the year a grass or reed-thatched cover is ample. Perhaps it would be easier to read their minds and come from the book contented than to peruse the tormented palimpsests of those I pass or greet in the crowded Plaza when the shadows fall and the band plays.

## CHAPTER IX

### LEAVING THE CRADLE CITY

"Latin" peoples. Law and the police. On being robbed. An accident a crime. The "Third Degree." Good Spaniards. The veil of language. Towards Cosigüina. *Fiestas* and crackers. Courtship. *Gasolinas*.

NO one can be more conscious than myself that this is not a "correct" book of travel. It lacks a continuous flow of adventure, and rash is the man who speaks of politics and looks to be read, unless, indeed, he is able to relate "sad stories of the deaths of kings" and to paint his picture in the vermillion of blood. But if character is fate a book is what it must be, and the writer can but regret that he lacks what others possess more fully. We all lack something, perhaps a capacity to make money or to tell stories, and one of my own incapacities lies in the art of taking notes. To take them properly we must feel we are strangers. In spite of my want of fluent Spanish I felt too much at home in Central America, as I do with all the so-called Latin people but the French, who, indeed, have far too much of the Teuton in them and are often round-headed Prussians disguised in a Roman language. And feeling at home made me think that all would come in good time. Why

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hurry to put things down ? I perceive the doctrine of mañana got hold of me. I sympathised, if not with high robbers, at least with the dominant sense of lawlessness. In Europe we are but puppets in the hands of law and regulation. In British Columbia I got into trouble by saying : " But isn't this an awful fuss to make about a man being killed ? " I had just come from Texas, and had sloughed not a little law.

But in Central America the joke is that the law itself is lawless. No man knows where to have it. Its only real vulnerable spot, its Achilles heel, is to be shot at with dollars ("oro," or par, of course). It is often an annoyance, but many can laugh at it afterwards. A man steals something from you, worth a few reals or a peso or two, and gets arrested. Who suffers ? You do. Let me assume you are a man of business to whom time is of value. You lose by theft, say, a pound of tobacco, and the thief is arrested. Being a poor man he loses nothing to speak of but the tobacco and gains board and lodging. You on the other hand lose days and perhaps weeks. Your time is spent with the police : the magistrates so yearn for your society that you are dragged away from stock-taking, from any business, to answer their questions. You answer, and feel you are the real criminal. How did you come by the tobacco ? Describe the tobacco. Is it good tobacco ? It is highly suspicious tobacco.

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Are you sure it paid duty? What did you say your name was? Well, it may be that you are speaking the truth. "May you go?" Yes, but come here to-morrow. Perhaps this is a caricature. Perhaps it isn't. I have heard of cases that cannot be caricatured. And what is the end? Do you get the tobacco returned? No, the police smoke it. Is it any wonder that people often will not complain of being robbed? Why should they be butchered to give the magistrate a happy day, a day when he feels he is really earning the money of which he robs the public. I came across one man who swore by all his gods that he would allow his bed to be stolen from under him without making a complaint. And shortly afterwards a thief abstracted from his store a roll of canvas. The police arrested the man and brought him to the store. "It is all right," said the owner of the stolen property. "I gave it to the poor chap." He narrowly escaped arrest, I suppose for compounding a crime, for the police were angry at being done out of a job in which there would have been pickings. The magistrates must have felt sore. He had not played the game.

When in a car it is better to have a fatal accident than one which merely results in damaging a pedestrian. There is less trouble about a dead man than an injured one. If a man is dead, why, he is dead, but if he is alive he can give evidence, often suggested to him by the police. A car-owner is

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presumably a man of money. If he is a gringo so much the better. Probably he will have more money. But to have an accident is a crime. The presumption is that it was brought about wilfully. Not long ago some young ladies had one just outside San Salvador. They were hurt and badly shaken. But they had had an accident. Could they deny it? They could not, and were arrested. Luckily, on the way to the "calaboose" they passed the President and called to him. He rescued them and sent them home in tears but filled with gratitude. We can hardly imagine King George riding up and telling the police "to get to hell out of that." But then no king is a president and above all law, even though it may not in ordinary times touch him personally. Besides accidents other disasters may happen to any traveller, or even to those who go for a spin in the cool of the evening. They may find a dead man in the road. The wise do not see him. They would be called as witnesses, and to be a witness is only a degree less dangerous than being the murderer. The police revel in any poor carcase. You may go on being a witness for months. And there will be murmurs of suspicion. Those who hide can find. It is possible you killed the man yourself. It is true he seems to have died of a machete wound, but anyone may have a machete. If you find a wounded man your estate is still less gracious. The counsel of perfection

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is to let him alone. "Ascend to paradise, hijo mio, and the sooner the better." At your peril take him into the car and carry him to the hospital. They may, it is true, kill him there, but it is you, the good Samaritan, who will pay more than a penny.

I heard of a man who lost a watch. His pocket was picked. He complained to the police. They took his evidence but took no steps to recover the watch. A month later he saw it in a pawnbroker's shop and went again to the Chief of Police. A long interval passed and he was sent for. "You have a big business," said the Chief casually, "and need much assistance. Give my son a job and I will see you get your watch back." There is little doubt that the police at times exceed even the methods of the Third Degree employed in the United States. By some they are accused of the methods of Torquemada and not without evidence. I heard of their whipping a man accused of theft till he confessed. So tortured witches confessed to witchcraft. However, in this case the man was guilty. The police carry clubs and revolvers, and are ready enough to use either if any real excuse is offered. But I always found them obliging and courteous. Those to blame are at the top, as usual. But I have actually seen more brutality by the police in the United States than I heard of in Central America. Even the Spanish are not so brutal as they were made out to be when they were our chief enemies!

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Many acted shamefully in the Americas, but there were more good men than Las Casas. We told the worst of them and ornamented it. In Spanish literature there are tales of the English similarly founded and adorned. Cunningham Graham, whose evidence is very valuable since his prejudices lie on the side of ideal justice, has defended the Spaniards as well as pilloried them in his vivid *Conquest of the River Plate*. I found little to complain of even as regards callousness to animals, except in such things as their treatment of the poor iguana. Horses are seldom ill-used. I rarely saw any of the awful sore backs and withers that made me refuse to ride some mules in the Canary Islands. Brutality is nearly always one aspect of political passion ; it is the angry conduct of a dog with a stolen bone when his latest acquisition is threatened, probably not by the owner of the bone but by another dog of a like political creed. We talk as if there was no cruelty in England, when magistrates fine some real devil five shillings and send a starved thief to gaol after a full-fed sermon. I doubt if there is any need in these republics for a society to protect children. We need not throw stones from our European glass-house. There is much humanity in man, even in a poor mestizo, and if man's cruelty makes millions mourn it is his helpless folly and his destiny which makes more millions perish. Our own withers are not unwrung even as regards some

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of our national heroes. Hawkins, who sailed the Honduras deeps, occupied Spanish towns till they bought his stolen negroes at his own price. Many dead bones lie buried in the Caribbean, and lie there a heavy monument and an accusing ossuary on Hawkins' memory. It is well to remember these things at times, lest we think ourselves "just men made perfect."

San Salvador was to me like a difficult but very interesting book. It held, but fatigued even with a perfect knowledge of a language, we have to learn in every new place how the words are used, what the symbols represent. A revolution in England is a mild political reform which powers behind the press do not like; in other places it has different meanings, and Central America would be paralleled in England if armed Liberals turned out Conservative office-holders with a little more bloodshed than I myself saw as a child in a contested election. In Russia the word has deeper and more awful connotations. We have to find out these differences wherever we go, and half the follies of hasty reporters in the United States and, say, South Africa, come from want of true verbal interpretations. They think they know and understand because what is said is, more or less, English. How shall an English negrophile interpret in the comfort of New York the three words, "The Black Shadow"? Let him live awhile beneath it. But when it came

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to Spanish I talked through a blanket. When my friends spoke English, and many spoke it perfectly, they spoke through a veil. In the end, much as I seemed to get hold of, I began to yearn to see things that I could touch and handle, were they but ants or spiders or trees in a forest. How good to be on a horse once more and perhaps to be alone. Happy is the man with many friends, but even happier is he who counts solitude among them ! I began to ask Don José when he would be ready to take us to Cosigüina. The place pictured itself to me as a shifting panorama of forest, plain, sand-hills and volcanoes, with herds of wild cattle and, it might be, a black jaguar lurking in the pathless bush where humming-birds abounded. There were failures in my dream, but not so many. And while I loafed and dreamed Don José went through the long-drawn-out agony of preparation in the land of mañana. Where my dream failed was in imagining a ranch-house founded on remembrance of California and Australia.

While waiting upon destiny to get to Cosigüina we wasted little time. N. and I wandered through the city, where powerful motor-cars of the latest model jostled the ancient bullock carretas, and vendors of odd merchandise sat outside stores crammed with the products of Lyons and Manchester. Sometimes we went to our friend Levy's store, where in the course of a day might be seen half the English-

to using it. In all Central America they boil down a large quantity and make a thickish black extract, which when diluted with hot water becomes coffee that would make a Parisian or Viennese groan to taste. There is, no doubt, caffeine in it, but the aromatic oil, caffeoine, which gives coffee its highest quality, seems lost for ever. It becomes a mere drink of the country.

Here in England we consume the fruits of the whole earth and know wondrous little of them. I have come across some people who think the coffee-berry is produced by a nut containing a large quantity of seeds. A berry, however, is simply the hard seed of a red pulpy fruit. This pulp is stripped in a pulping mill and the berries are left with a thin parchment-like husk upon them. This is removed when they have been dried upon an open-air concrete drying floor, and the berries are then graded. The worst broken berries are, I

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believe, known in the English market as "triage." The finest qualities are big, hard, greenish and semi-translucent and fetch high prices.

Interesting as it was to watch the processes of coffee in the making, it was still better, when we had seen all there was to see, to sit on the verandah of the house, then unoccupied except by caretakers, and have cool drinks on the flower-screened verandah. These were brought to us by the woman in charge and her daughter, and their very beautiful courtesy enhanced the value of the raspberry *frescos*, and the fruit and flowers with which they loaded our car. On our return to the city we met the owners of the *finca*, one of whom inquired anxiously, almost fiercely, whether we had been properly treated. When N. said, "I fear we have robbed you of many flowers," he replied, of course, that they and the *finca* were all, all hers.

No doubt amongst all these peoples, as amongst our own, there is a strain of ancient savagery. Many gringos have made themselves hated, and some have been murdered dreadfully in all the republics. But such things happen only when political passions are at their height, and even then they are mostly provoked by domineering manners or insults or outrageous folly. The dislike of gringos is infinitely less than the hatred of Jews in many parts of Europe, and courtesy is almost always met by courtesy. I heard a true tale which shows how some lack of

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manners may turn a desire to please into cold anger. A young Englishman who was about to make his home in Central America brought out with him a good deal of furniture. He said to the captain of the ship, " You know these people and I don't. Do you think you could speak to some of them at the Customs and ask them to go easy with the duties on my things ? " The captain did so, and the Aduana authorities replied, " A friend of yours we will charge nothing." But in the end the charges amounted to £60, and the young man went back to the ship in a fury. In the meantime the captain had gone ashore, but when he returned his passenger complained bitterly. " You said I should have to pay nothing ! " " What did you expect ? " replied the man who knew his Central American. " You went into the Chief's office with your pipe in your mouth and your hands in your pockets." If that young man meant to live out there long perhaps that lesson in politeness was cheap at the price.

With all their politeness it must, however, be owned that in the mass the populace lack a fine consideration for those who desire to go to sleep. During the nights I was often much more anxious to leave San Salvador than during the day. A local fiesta, connected with some saint, who cannot have been a Quietist, began soon after our arrival and continued without intermission. It seems that nothing pleases some saints so much as fire-works.

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When Tertullian promised the elect the joy of looking down from heaven and seeing their enemies frying in the Pit he was probably thinking mostly of the fire-works of hell. As the passage is found in *De Spectaculis*, he certainly considered such a show as good as a circus. In San Salvador the money spent on crackers must have been a very large sum. They cracked all night. One supposes that saints do not need sleep. Their adorers do without it and make the rest of the world sleepless. The night after the crackers began to die down I was wakened by something else. In Central America courting is a kind of collective game carried on with great noise and publicity. I gather that the lover goes round to his friends saying that he finds he admires or loves Señorita So-and-so and means to serenade her. After condoling with him they agree to stand by him and wake the echoes of a quiet street as well as the young lady somewhere about 2 a.m. The lover and his chorus hire a marimba, or anything equally noisy, and assemble in dead silence. Suddenly the uproar begins. You, a stranger, imagine that the earthquake has come at last. Volcan San Salvador must be in eruption. But by the time you have reached the floor you guess wildly that this is an example of Central American love-making and scramble back to bed, wondering as you do if the young lady in the neighbouring house hurt herself when she touched the floor.

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But after all a serenade is a compliment. She has compensations. Others have none. After half an hour of pandemonium the maniacs outside utter a series of vivas and retire. The whole world now knows that Señor Don X. is pleased with Señorita Y., and all the other señoritas get together, wonder what he sees in her, tear her to pieces, and call upon her with congratulations. For an eligible to disappear and come back quietly with a wife of whom no one knows anything is a fraud on public expectation. It is not playing the game.

Don José was all this time playing his half-yearly game of getting away to see if Cosigüina still existed. It was necessary to prepare things. These things included bedding, pillows, sheets, blankets, even lamps. It seemed that it was impossible to keep anything at the estancia. As soon as the *patron* locked up and went away a sense of desolation and hopelessness of ever seeing him again fell on those left behind. They are all honest enough in their way, but how absurd to lock up useless things like lamps and blankets where no one could use them! Don José had gone home again. Would he ever return? Quien sabe? Things disappeared miraculously; for if a padlock must remain intact a staple can be extracted and replaced. A boy can also get through bars to "borrow" something. If God is good it shall be returned—mañana! So now every time that the ranch is visited all things

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needed are brought and taken away again. It took twenty-two packages to see us through the Cosigüina visit, and the whole of ten days to arrange, with the greatest uncertainty of results, for deadly and precarious vessels known as *gasolinas* to take us all across the Gulf of Fonseca to the Nicaraguan shore. If I speak bitterly of the whole breed of *gasolinas* and express a fierce preference for a bongo or barge, the sequel will surely justify me. The word *gasolina* must be branded on my heart. If at any time anything written here seems over-critical I now profess that there is nothing truly hateful in these Americas but the casual, crowded, erratic, and untrustworthy petrol launch.

Perhaps the superstitious may think that someone's luck was due to the fact that we did at last get away from the cradle city of earthquakes on the 13th February.

## CHAPTER X

### UNDER THE SHADOW OF SAN MIGUEL

Leaving San Salvador. Trains and food. Fruits. "Guns." San Vicente. Sacatecoluca. San Miguel. Cutuco. Chinese servants. *Gasolinas* again. Santa Mañana. Democratic feeling. A Gulf sunset.

THE train for La Union in the south of Salvador started at seven in the morning. It usually leaves on time; there is no question of "menos los mulos" with its administration. So we had to rise about five in the morning or stay up all night. The line is part of the International Railways or Ferrocarril Internacional of Central America, and is controlled by Americans and run by American engineers. This fact gave us assurance that we should not be delayed in order to tie up part of the machinery with string. But it was no guarantee of punctuality farther down the line, for the entire personnel of the road cannot be North American.

Our party consisted of Don José and Doña Eva, N., myself, Caceres, the Don's chauffeur, and Clementina, Doña Eva's maid and devoted adorer. As usual in Central America a police-agent took down our names in the train. We carried food with us, for the lunches brought to the train and

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peddled from dusty baskets, though plentiful and greasy, may be justly suspected of a varied bacillary flora. The natives, however, seem happily immune, and take a part of a chicken wrenched by dirty hands from the whole cooked bird, and rice or frijoles scooped up in the vendor's fingers and served in a leaf, without any apparent fear of results. We ourselves relied on fruit and on hot coffee and ice-cold water brought in thermos flasks. At every station fruit was offered. I cannot name all the variety, but there were bananas, pine-apples, oranges, water-melons, musk-melons, sapote, nispera, mango, grenadilla, papaya, custard-apples, avocado pears, mariñones, and coco-nuts. Many of these were very good, and some so disagreeable to sight and taste that they demand early education to appreciate their hidden qualities.

The train was full, even in the first-class cars. The seconds, in which the *gente del pueblo* mostly travel, were packed like sardine tins. Every woman was in colours and colours that spoke aloud, so that the carriages looked like herbaceous borders. Many people travelled first who by their clothes seemed rather out of place there, not that the firsts are luxurious or even particularly clean. Most of the men in our car carried "guns" and cartridge belts. One at least had in addition a big knife. All looked ready for war, but, as in most places where arms are carried openly, everyone was civil and obliging.

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I shall not waste time over that hot journey. We crawled up the hill and saw Ilopango shining in the distance with the Volcan San Salvador behind it. Then the railroad sweeps in curves which seem endless round the base of San Vicente. From this volcano there seemed no escape. We saw it ahead of us and then behind us, and again it suddenly rose up in front, and after disappearing magically grew up once more as an apparent barrier. But at last among the tangled wilderness of crumpled hills, yellowish with sacate and here and there bright green with sugar-cane, we came down to Sacatecoluca, once the end of the line and a busy little place. It is mentioned in one of the voyages of Hakluyt as a desirable city to sack. It would have proved disappointing to those who made the golden city of Manoa out of nothing and spent themselves seeking El Dorado. The town is so situated that for the train to get to it and come away on the southern line with the locomotive in front a triangle is necessary. We went down on the main line and then backed into Sacatecoluca. I had come away with insufficient cigarettes and could find none, so it was here from the end of the carriage that I called out to the crowd at large : “ Does anyone speak English ? ” A cheerful and obliging fellow replied with a fine American accent that he did, and after getting me some cigarettes he obliged me with the story of his life as a tram-car conductor

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in San Francisco. My Spanish grew worse rather than better where many spoke English.

At every station we passed a crowd, for the daily trains are as good as a circus to these people, and at last, not much behind time, reached San Miguel. This is said to be the most dangerous, treacherous and unexpected in action of all the Central American volcanoes. It is an almost perfect truncated cone, now with a slight notch in the summit which renders it unmistakable as a landmark. West of it stretch many miles of black forbidding lava, ash and cinder fields, with here and there a green tree among them accentuating the blackness of the flow which covers a once fertile country. It looked like the backyard of Vulcan himself. Those connected with the train had, however, a passion for San Miguel, or so it seemed. They lingered there for at least an hour, and now and then shunted us about to keep us in spirits. We thus felt we were not wholly forgotten. Finally, when we were about two hours behind time, they tore themselves away from this place's attractions. We should now reach La Union in the dark. This did not trouble me. For once the burden was on other shoulders, and I soon saw that however hard it was to get away from San Salvador Don José was capable of thinking ahead and getting things arranged even at a distance. La Union was once a real port, though without deep water. It is now, as far as shipping is concerned,

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the shadow of its real self, since there is deep water a few miles nearer to the open ocean at the new port Cutuco, where there are adequate wharves to deal with the trade done there. We went on to Cutuco, and were met by the local railroad manager, who put us up in a big flat which belongs to the General Manager and is just above his own. Of these arrangements José had said nothing. I was glad to find our destination was not some doubtful fonda. By now I had forgotten all about gasolinias, and in a clean screened house with baths and capable Chinese servants grew unduly optimistic. Across the dark waters of the Gulf lay our desired Nicaragua, and that sense of freedom which comes when cities and streets are but memories. As for time, what of that? Once I heard a man ask the time, and I made a motion towards my watch. "Do not trouble," said Don José, "this is Central America. Let him find out." But even he had yet to learn more than he knew as regards time and space, hours and places, on that lovely shore.

Vincente, the Chinese boy, was of the reserved and inscrutable type which even those who have never known it have learnt to look for. It is one of the satisfactions of a varied life to have a choice variety in acquaintance. I have known men of a great European reputation, and have camped with murderers, cannibals, horse-thieves and politicians. I had worked with and even been friends with many

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Chinese. They vary from an ambassador with the skull of a philosopher to a Hong-Kong wharf-rat with the brains and vices of a rodent. Some I had known were not inscrutable, for after all that look is but the mark of an ancient race. They do not understand us and are not to be blamed for it, and have learnt to take the absurdities of the white races with calm. Ramon, the head Chinese "boy," aged perhaps about fifty, was more communicative than Vincente. He told me with the pleasantest smile that he did not like Englishmen, and made no motion of dissent when it was said that his objection to them was founded on the absurd English view that a dollar, even when translated into food and the like, should be regarded as worth a hundred cents. Ramon had perhaps Oriental ideas on the subject of commission. But he was a perfect servant. To be robbed and made comfortable is better than to be ill-served by incapable honesty.

That night half a gale blew through the screens of our house and rattled every window of the inner rooms. The Gulf of Fonseca so complicated the normal trend of the daily land and sea-breezes that the land breeze seemed to come from the sea. The beauty of this Gulf is well known. It even affected the sober minds of those who compiled the *North Pacific Directory*, a publication which, however interesting to seamen, rarely makes emotional references to land- or sea-scapes. It was too dark





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when we reached Cutuco to discern more than the dull facts of a new port, but as the gasolina was to be ready for us very early Don José told us to be prepared to leave at five. Thus we should arrive at Potosi, our destined Nicaraguan "port," before the sun was at its worst. Another gasolina was to carry the bulk of the baggage. I own that it seemed tempting Providence to believe that two could be got ready at once. But someone, a good and ready liar, told the Don that all his baggage was even now in one gasolina and that the other would be ready "on time." Fatigue made me credulous; perhaps it had some effect even on Don José.

We rose at half-past four; the Chinese boys brought us coffee, put iced water on the table and laid breakfast. In spite of some ugly commercial buildings, the far horizon, on whatever quarter, looked wonderful in the early sun. San Miguel was still with us; the Nicaraguan El Viejo was pink and gold; a wild tangle of Honduran hills barred the south-east. I believed the *Pacific Directory* and went to breakfast satisfied. And then it was five o'clock. Everything was packed and ready. But there were no signs of the gasolina *Colorado*. Don José went out to investigate. We saw him disappear. He appeared again at seven. To be a doctor and the owner of a Central American ranch a man must be of a philosophical temperament. Patients are apt to put more faith in saints than

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in their physician, and the way things can go wrong on a ranch appears miraculous to those who have not learnt just what to expect. So Don José was perfectly calm. Had he not been through revolutions and earthquakes? Still, I have heard of a tough old seaman who had gone through hell, as it were, bursting into tears on account of the mosquitoes in the Rio Magdalena. A thousand worries may be worse than a big wound. It seemed that an especial arrangement of Providence, against which much appears to have been said, had set one gasolina on fire the night of our arrival, while our own special one was, somehow, "Dios sabe porque," not at La Union or Cutuco but at Amapala, the port of Honduras in Tigre Island. It seemed that the long-threatened revolution, of which we had heard premonitory rumblings at Tela, was now doing well. Señor, many, many have been killed at Tegucigalpa! Real news there was none. Rumour supplied its want. But the point was that it looked as if the authorities, new or old, in Amapala might have commandeered or corralled our little vessel. It might come or might not. Everyone expressed sympathy for us, but everyone was really happy. Even the smallest excitement helps dull lives. The ready and ingratiating liar who had told the Don the night before that the baggage had been put on board the burnt boat was not disturbed, and explained that he had merely been

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mistaken in saying that he had seen to that himself. Others swore by the Holy Mother and the saints that our boat would come "to-morrow." We prayed to Santa Mañana and retired to the shade and our hammocks. It is no good swearing when it is very hot. Who in Central America can have the energy to be angry during the siesta?

All that Cutuco afforded as entertainment later was a large shark, *tiburon*, sailing close to the wharf. We therefore went by train back to La Union, Don José, Doña Eva, N. and I., and wandered about the little coloured town. The only ugly thing in it is the correct and damnably orderly Plaza, otherwise every corner of it ought to be painted in water-colours. It seemed that all the world in La Union knew Don José. We had many proofs that day of some real democratic feeling among all classes, when politics do not cleave them asunder as with a machete. However classes may be divided by interests, their divisions are not accentuated by any of that often unconscious air of superiority to others which is the real and great reason why so many Englishmen are hated wherever they go. There is much common humanity in Spanish blood, especially when warmed and mitigated by that of the Indian. After a time we wandered down to the Gulf shore, and were in good time for such a sunset as seldom falls to the lot of man. I saw how the Gulf of Fonseca had come by its reputation.

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We watched it from the long wooden jetty, now so little used, and from it the town, even the big, blue-painted Aduana, looked a jewel set in atmospheric colour. There are those who think they can describe sunsets, but not even the fire and glory of Turner's palette could touch the wonders of that evening as every colour that the sky can use glowed and vanished and renewed itself in the waters or on volcanic peaks that pierced the far horizon. Fire and magic flamed about San Miguel's high cone, and El Viejo and Momotombo at each fresh moment surprised the imagination with some new splendour. Then the gateways of Paradise closed slowly and a melting star replaced the sun, while Venus herself shone as an evening lamp, and in the east a great white moon lifted herself above the far-seen volcanoes of the Nicaragua we were to visit when Fate and the due lapse of time allowed us to depart.

It may be that those who live in the tropics and are born there do not always see what the stranger sees, but I was happy to know that our host, who was silent with our silence as we turned away, said at last that this was something to be remembered. What years it was since he and I had stood in the snows of St. Moritz and wondered to see the afterglow on Piz Langarde ! And there we had spoken of Nicaragua. Now Nicaragua died down in the night shadows, but was close at hand and friendly.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GULF OF FONSECA

In the Gulf. U.S.A. *Tacoma*. A breakdown. A heavy sea. The last cylinder goes. Gulf seamanship. Getting ashore. Potosi. *Carretas*. Ride through the forest. At the *estancia*. Our reported death. Excitement at San Salvador.

IN the morning the gasolina, in which we had almost ceased to believe, really did come back from Amapala without any great stories other than those common to folks fertile in excuses. The crew reported fighting at Tegucigalpa, but said that Amapala was quiet. That very day we found out the reason for such unlooked-for peacefulness. The boat came to Cutuco early and was prepared to leave early. Therefore—is that not the right word?—we let go the wharf late, and already the sun scorched us as we climbed aboard at eleven. The thermometer was then 80° in the shade and rising rapidly. What it was on board beat all computation, as our shade was a thin awning, and we grilled in the mixed odours of petrol, bilge-water and of a savage-looking, dirty, and speechless engineer who appeared far more capable of scalping us than of running a two-cylinder engine, of which very

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early I conceived grave suspicions. In the land-locked and now almost windless shelter of La Union Bay the heat was soon terrific, but the engine worked well. The sea was as calm as the traditional duck-pond. Presently, however, when we ran past the high rocky islands Conchaguita and Manguera and Chicarene Point, we were in the open gulf and a strong breeze coming off Honduras raised a heavy lop.

If a pitching craft with uncertain machinery tends towards anything but happiness the scene itself was almost enough to make some of us ignore the possibility of danger. Long ago I renounced any hope of realistic painting in words. A place described is but transcribed into the experiences of the reader. I knew an intelligent little girl who read Scott with eagerness and saw the romantic pageants of his tales unroll themselves in the dull precincts of her own house. Let those who know beauty sum their remembrances and dream they see Fonseca. Open and closed waters, blue-green and silkily opalescent in the far distance, set off islands that disclosed narrow straits and then shut them to open new distances in which volcanic cones, very sharply drawn against the sky, bade us remember we were in the land of subterranean fire. Easy it was to understand how seamen, weary of the endless wastes of ocean, entered this gulf with delight. Here may have sailed a western Ulysses

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to the lure of a new Circe or Calypso. But now, when abreast of El Tigre, we saw one of the last words in modern sea-ships. The U.S.A. *Tacoma* lay there at anchor. This was the reason of the comparative peace of Amapala. To all these republics their northern neighbour is the man with the big stick, a portent and a striding terror.

The time came soon when it was more difficult to appreciate what Nature set before us. The breeze strengthened, and the sea made heavy weather for so small a craft. What if a breakdown happened? That would no doubt be a minor adventure, but little experience of the sea is wanted to be aware that a minor trouble may easily end in something greater. The presence of women can lift some common disaster to tragic heights. Don José preserved immovable calm, but I knew that Doña Eva did not like the sea. N., sublimely ignorant of any element of danger, was "drinking it all in," like the young lady in a gondola on the Grand Canal, and was superbly happy. I did not speak to José, but I was not at all happy. And, to justify my fears, when we got half-way across the Gulf with Cosigüina broad on our starboard bow, one of our two cylinders went on strike. Little was said: the captain evidently did not wish to alarm any of us. He spoke to the engineer, who merely looked murderous and answered not at all, and I whistled to make believe I liked it. But the breeze grew fresher and

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the sea got up, till those with knowledge might well feel a little anxious with the open Pacific now under our lee. The tides in the Gulf are not as a rule very strong ; the rise at La Union at full and change is about ten feet, but with the breeze a breakdown on the ebb might easily result in our drifting helplessly outside the Gulf. If the remaining cylinder went we had nothing but two small oars to handle a heavy and clumsy craft. The other gasolina, which carried the bulk of the baggage, was already far out of sight, and in the dark night might never find us if we were overdue at Potosi.

Our potential murderer stuck to his job, though he looked as black as a lava-field, and eased his rattle-trap engine every time we dived. We made slow progress, but presently the run of the sea eased as we passed Monypenny Point, and it was possible to see where Potosi lay. Presently the breeze fell light and the sea went down. Then at last the second remaining cylinder went out of action. That it had lasted so long was such luck that I laughed aloud, but it was no laughing matter for the skipper and the engineer, who, since we were obviously in safety, seemed about to resort to knives or steel spanners. They made as much noise as a couple of coyotes and quarrelled furiously. So far as I could gather the engineer said, "Well, what did I tell you?" and argued that he had done well with machinery which would disgrace any common

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scrap-heap, while the skipper's argument seemed to be that any decent mechanic could run a boat with a pint of petrol and a couple of sardine tins. The discussion was brought to an end when we saw that the other gasolina had observed our difficulties. Then ensued an exhibition of seamanship which would have made a mud-turtle on a log laugh. She came up and hove us a piece of string or something like it, and tried to take us in tow. They had not the sense to go ahead easily. This tow-rope parted with the first strain. They knotted it together and tried again. It parted once more. On the third attempt they missed us altogether and had to make a big circle. Now another piece of rotten inch rope was produced, and with two such pieces of twine another trial was made. On this fourth attempt they got us moving. But seamanship everywhere is on the decline. On the passage out from England I saw three men trying to take a "thorough-foot" out of a tackle by main strength. They did not know enough to "capsize a block."

A few minutes later we lay at anchor off the forest-lined beach of Potosi, and the comedy began of getting ashore in a stretch of shallow water. The narrow, sandy beach, backed by its gloomy bush, was cut into towards the west by the warm or, at least, tepid water of the Rio Dulce, fed by deep volcanic springs. Eastwards, looking towards the

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cone of El Viejo, the sand was strewn with logs, cut from Gasteazoro's hardwoods, awaiting shipment to Amapala in a bongo. Many people stood waiting for us as the shadows of the evening began to fall. But getting to them took time. A nearly naked peon in an old *piragua* or dug-out, such as I had used of old in British Columbian lakes, made slow way to us with a single rude paddle. Perhaps it was lucky that the canoe was so heavy and clumsy, for it was able to take six of us besides the boatman. We then drifted shorewards before the breeze, and presently stuck on a sandbank in about three feet of water. The little crowd on the beach saluted us and yelled out greetings and advice. Then a carreta drawn by two oxen backed out to us. This vehicle, with solid wooden wheels sawn from a whole tree, was very long and narrow. It was fitted with rude sides and so thatched over with palm leaves that it formed a long tunnel, bedded with straw. As I was in the bow of the dug-out I crawled in first and dragged my hostess after me. She had suffered so much in the heavy sea that to be in the straw of the carreta made her happy again. The driver kept his oxen still for a moment and I tried to help N. into the tunnel. Just then the oxen "pulled out." It was touch and go that we were not both in the water. I loosed her just in time. Once more they backed, and once more they started too early. Nothing could induce them to back again,

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so the two of us already in the carreta were taken to the beach, while N. was carried ashore in the arms of a stalwart *campisto* or cow-boy. Then the canoe was dragged close to the shore and the rest disembarked. We were in Nicaragua at last.

Under a shelter of trees stood a cluster of rude framed houses, scarcely better than the native huts. They belonged to Don José's nearest neighbour, a young Frenchman, a Nicaraguense of French origin, who was handling the hardwood trade. He was going to Amapala in the gasolina, or hoped he was, since gasolinas are gasolinas, and was waiting for us with Monte Alegre, then the manager of Cosigüina Ranch, a big Nicaraguense named Anselmo, who looked not unlike some North American Indian chief, and Ramon, a dark and brilliant-eyed native of the ranch itself, who was head of the campistas. Many of their subordinates I got to know afterwards, but now night was coming on and the hacienda was some ten or twelve miles inland. A number of horses and mules with native Spanish-American saddles stood ready for those of our party who were to ride. The women-folk, who were not prepared for riding, went on first in the long carreta, now converted into an open carriage. Doña Eva, N. and Clementina disappeared into the forest and were a mile on their way before an animated talk on the beach broke up and our cavalcade started.

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A ride by night in a new country, even when there is a brilliant moon seen at intervals through breaks in the forest, cannot be described. How shall one name shadows or interpret new sounds or odours or, indeed, recall the infinite variety of fleeting impressions? But our upward passage did recall to me rides of long ago in far Australia under the shadows of giant gums and box-trees or in a forest of odorous wattle. Then again California returned and even wilder places still in Oregon and British Columbia. Now I was not solitary as I had mostly been in those days. It seems that Anselmo had been given special charge of me by the *patron*. It looked as if he believed I could by no means take care of myself. He pointed out every branch that I might, by using great dexterity, run into, and I imagined him murmuring "cuidado" even when he did not call it aloud. There are certain compensations in age. I found not a little pleasure in receiving with humility instructions on points familiar to me long years before some of my advisers were born. We went on in single file and passed warm volcanic streams, in some of which alligators lay, though none were to be seen. Mostly they lie close in the swamps, though upon warm nights they sprawl on the sandy banks of streams and leave huge scaly imprints of their armour. We started many sleeping birds, and big steers or cows, chewing the cud, rose up before us and scattered or merely

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stood at gaze. We left the forest and came to a "road," that is to a clearing fenced on both sides, and marked with carreta wheels that carried the heavy cheeses down to Potosi. And then at last I saw a light. It was not Cosigüina Ranch, but a native hut by a deserted house. To one unaccustomed for years to riding the way was long. But finally many lights showed, fires built outside the shacks the workers lived in, and then I saw the low bulk of the ranch house with a lamp alight on a table in the verandah. We rode into the yard about the house, and as we alighted someone fired a gun. The *patron* had arrived at ten o'clock ! An hour after came the women-folk. I had never known oxen travel so fast. Hot and tired and dusty, we sat down to a late meal with saltless, flat corn-meal tortillas, set out on the verandah, while dogs and pigs wandered about in the outer darkness and the dim figures of women passed going to the near well. Our host and hostess slept on the verandah. N. was given a large room with three doors. My room was not ready, so I slung my own hammock and slept, none too well, after a tiring day. It had been rather arduous, but we little knew how soon San Salvador was to be disturbed by what we had, on the whole, taken with reasonable calmness. N. indeed had gratified me by enjoying every moment of it. It is no small responsibility to take the inexperienced into the wilderness. To seek for

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gratitude is often to encounter reproach. If Saul looked for asses and found a kingdom, it is also possible to look for a kingdom and get a kick. My only troubles with my young fellow-traveller were due to her displaying an ardent desire to make forty-eight hours out of twenty-four, and a very rare but equally ardent desire to break her neck, either from a horse or the edge of a precipice. And she never growled, not even at niguas. But I had better dispose here of the clamour in San Salvador.

There was, indeed, in that city a truly Central American sequel to our little adventure in the gasolina. I suggested before that Mr. Deschamps' attempt to get to Amapala in our floating scrap-heap might possibly fail. The captain and the dark and gloomy engineer patched her up, perhaps with glue or sticking plaster, and taking Deschamps aboard, started for El Tigre Island. In the Gulf both cylinders gave out. The helpless launch drifted ashore not far from Cosigüina Point. With a trifle more westerly drift they would have been out in the Pacific, which I had feared would be our lot. But another gasolina luckily hove in sight, was signalled to, and took off the passenger, who finally reached Amapala. How it started no one could say, but if vegetation grows rapidly in the tropics rumour can give it points and a beating. Tales of the mixed troubles of the gasolina reached La Union in fearful and fragmentary forms. A casual

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journalist with a brilliant synthetic mind converted two farces into tragedy. He telegraphed to San Salvador in the following terms :—

“ La Union, febrero 17th de 1924. Depositado a las 10h. 4m. Recibido en la Direccion de Policia a las 14h. 45m. Señor Director General.—La gasolina *Colorado*, que salio antier para el Potosi llevando el doctor José Gasteazoro y acompañantes, tienese datos que a la altura de Las Lajas sufrio un desperfecto el motor, quedando a merced de las olas. Anoche salio *El Trionfo* en su busca, regresando hoy a las cinco sin encontrarla ni tener noticias. Siguese investigando y daré cuanto.”

For the benefit of those with even less Spanish than my own this may be roughly translated as follows :—

“ It has been ascertained that the gasolina *Colorado*, which sailed yesterday for Potosi with Dr. Gasteazoro and his party, had a motor breakdown in the latitude of Las Lajas and remained at the mercy of the waves. To-night the *Trionfo* went in search of her, but came back at five o'clock without meeting her or picking up any news. I will send word of further search.”

This naturally enough caused a sensation in San Salvador almost equal to the death of a *matador* in the bull-ring. The telegram was interpreted in the most pessimistic manner. We had been drowned, crew and all. The telegraph and telephone

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wires hummed. We became of interest to the police, even to the Government and the President. Gasteazoro is not only a big land-owner but a popular practising doctor. Doña Eva has many friends. It added tabasco, or hot pepper sauce, to throw in an English writer and his step-daughter, whom the papers described as my *sobrina* or niece. *La Casa de Salud* was bombarded for news and had none. Just as obituary notices were being discussed in editorial offices a further telegram reduced the disaster to a poor minimum. Only the crew were drowned. A further wire saved them, and all that some of the papers could do was to tell the whole story with big headlines and then pass on to the next sensation.

I regret to say that the San Salvador journalists lack the pep and enterprise of their bright La Union colleague. None had the notion of cabling to London the death of an errant English writer in the Gulf of Fonseca, and I therefore lost the opportunity of reading a few brief obituary notices. When I heard the tale it was too late to suggest that Reuter's might be able to use such a story. I could not even cable that the report of my death was premature, or as Mark Twain said on a like occasion, "grossly exaggerated." I had to satisfy myself with being alive on a Nicaraguan estancia about as far from the crowds we call civilisation as it is possible to get in these latitudes.





## CHAPTER XII

### COSIGÜINA

Hammocks. The *estancia*. *Queserias*. Workers. The liquor question. Patriarchal life. The *nigua*. Milking. Cheeses. Cattle and precedence. Mygales. Scorpions. Treatment of animals. Buck-jumping. The *lazo*.

THE night was warm enough to camp out on the ground very comfortably, but a hammock often becomes a cold bed unless one has plenty of blankets to lie on. I had not slept in one for many years, and woke at intervals to find all the bedding on top of me and none beneath. I cursed hammocks and the world at large, and slept and woke again when some twenty dogs barked at the cry of a distant coyote, and cocks, a full dozen of them, crowed at intervals from the branches of a big *amate* tree standing between the house and the commissary, or store-house, and the slaughter-pen. On the trees above that pen black sopilotes or buzzards clustered in groups waiting for a possible meal later. I was glad when the dawn showed in the east. The sun rose in a reddish glow which heralded and foretold a burning day. For now it was the height of the dry season. I washed in a basin on the verandah and shaved without a glass in public,

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for soon the campistas were on the move, and early women from the huts scattered round the ranch-house came to the only well. They drew water with buckets by means of a single creaking block and went off barefoot with the pail upon their heads. They carry everything that way, even their rations of red raw meat. Then they looked horrible, as horrible as the red-headed buzzards. Of these there are two kinds, the black or grey-headed and the species which seems fresh from some bloody feast and is called a *guzma*.

The ranch-house itself was a simple building of two large main rooms and a little one used by Don José as an office. A covered verandah ran round three sides of the building. Close to it on the last side was the kitchen, a rough shack without windows or chimney. The smoke of the fire escaped where it could. The yard about the house was heavy dust, many inches thick, covered in places with coarse weeds or *sacate*. A fence had once surrounded the house. It was built to keep out pigs, but now its condition was not good and its purpose forgotten. We took our meals in the verandah to a chorus of grunts as big old sows rubbed themselves against posts which extended with thatch the shadow of the roof. Presently horses and mules were brought under the thatch and hitched up. Some of the campistas, or Monte Alegre's busy and chattering man Castillo, saddled and cinched

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them. They were for those of us who meant to ride with Don José on his first inspection of the fourteen *queserías*, or cheese-making huts.

Cosigüina estancia is not so large as some ranches I have worked on. It is far smaller than many stations in Australia. I was myself a campisto, to use an alien phrase, a cattleman and boundary rider, on an Australian station of some eleven hundred square miles. Nevertheless, Cosigüina is to English notions rather a territory than a ranch. It consists of thirteen *potreros*, or pasture grounds, and is probably about four hundred square miles, or some two hundred and fifty thousand acres in area. In such a country none may reckon so many animals to an acre. It is a question as to how many acres can support a cow through years of alternating scarcity and plenty. It seems as if the answer was fifty acres, for the ranch carried, perhaps, five thousand head of cattle and horses. I do not say it could not carry more, but a much larger number would be an extra risk in times of drought. On the big Australian station of 700,000 acres of salt-bush and cotton-bush were about 200,000 sheep. But Cosigüina is largely forest, and cannot be compared with the open salt-bush plains of the Lachlan Back-Blocks.

Including all male hands, Cosigüina employs some seventy-five men, peons and campistas. As there is no liquor, aguardiente or "white-eye," to

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be had nearer than Chinandega, which is eighteen leagues away, there is little quarrelling among them and the machete is kept for its proper use in the bush. Sometimes scoundrelly liquor dealers run in white rum, and then there is trouble. They mostly get turned back, for Don José's orders on the point are strict. It might do the advocates of drink good to observe its effects in some of these republics. We rely on it for a large revenue in Britain, and never count the cost at which we raise it. In Salvador it is a great resource for the Government. An *estanco* is a very low kind of drinking shop. A town of three or four thousand inhabitants may have four or five of them which also supply the district. They can only keep their licences if each house sells monthly 4,000 litres of "white-eye." With four estancos that means 16,000 litres, or 28,000 pints, say, in a month. The men drink most of it, and then there is the machete at work every Sunday and fiesta and pay-day. Those who do not go to gaol for long periods or to the hospital are run in for being drunk and fined five pesos each. The hands are not paid heavily on Cosigüina. A campisto gets but six dollars a month and beef and flour for himself and his family. But perhaps the women reckon the fact that the nearest poison den is over fifty miles away worth more than double pay.

Though all these people often look quiet and sombre, perhaps because of their Indian blood,

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they can always smile when greeted. They, too, lack the European look of anxiety on their dark faces, for they do not live in a state of unstable equilibrium but are near the fertile earth. Many of the workers were born there. Some can remember Don José's father and grandfather. There is something patriarchal and friendly in his rule. They like to be spoken to by the *patron* and are anxious to please him, even if after the manner of children they forget to obey him when he is not there. Is he, too, not a doctor? They bring their babies to him as to a magician. But since to rub a horse's belly with the patron's drawers is known to cure the poor animal of colic, there may be something magical in merely being a patron. On the whole their health is good. No doubt the big-bellied children have hook-worm or ankylostomiasis (*ankylostoma duodenale*). But the worm is universal out there. It can be cured without the dangers of thymol by properly graduated injections of oil of chenopodium. The nigua or jigger flea (*dermophilus penetrans*) is also a pest, but a less harmful one. I picked up six of these tropical nuisances and got José to cut them out. N. took her share with patience. After all, the troubles of the tropics are not worse than those of England. To hear some relate the disasters possible to travellers or the native makes me think they have never looked at any book of pathology. I had six days of slight illness in these republics, and in the

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English winter should have had sixty if I had not avoided them by the drastic process of dying. After all, there are compensations for niguas.

But talking like this is to keep the horses waiting. We went off quite early and visited the nearest queseria, a rude hut in a big corral filled with cows, that had just been milked, and their calves. This queseria was the only one run by a woman, a grey-haired and very determined-looking native, once not without good looks. She ruled her own little kingdom with a rod of iron, and was so capable that she needed no advice and would have rejected it. In the early morning the cattle corral set among big forest trees, *jenisaros*, *conicaste*, and *caoba*, was very picturesque. As we rode up the cows were being turned out to pasture. They moved lazily, each with her offspring. They are made quiet to manage from the beginning, for the calves are tied to the mother's fore-leg while she is being milked, and become tame and easy to handle when they have calves of their own. To break really wild young cows with their first calf is one of the most dangerous jobs I have ever done, for savage young cows are far worse and far quicker than any steer. They can turn in their own length and their young horns are sharp. To be spread-eagled on a stockyard fence with a cow's horns taking white splinters out of the rails beneath one is an experience, no doubt, but better to remember than to risk again.

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Cosigüina supplies an enormous amount of the rough, hard cheeses eaten by the gente del pueblo of San Salvador. They look like square blocks of concrete and weigh about 100 lbs. each. They are very nutritious, and one of the greatest sources of protein, or body-building substances, used by the poor. Of course, there is a tax on them when they enter Salvador. No opportunity is lost of putting on an *impuesto* in any of these republics. The authorities are as bad as the Kruger regime in the old Transvaal, which put a tax on imported trees, though the country needed them badly. The Cosigüina cheeses are dried by smoke in an upper story of the quesería, so whether the heat is 80° or 100° in the shade there is nearly always a wood fire burning down below. There is something charming, pastoral, and almost Theocritan in the atmosphere of these queserías. When dawn was over and the level sun shot through the noble forest trees there was still a mist of night, as it were, about the deep glades, and as the red and red-and-white cows moved with dignity, for in the quiet tread of cattle there is a dignity befitting Io before Hera tormented her with the gadfly, and their calves, now quiet, went with them, and the bull moaned a little as though he dreamed of a challenge, I recalled the Sicilian poet and other scenes, half sunk in memory, of Australia and Texas and California. There are deep pastoral memories in the race about all cattle

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and the "friendly ox," man's blood-brother ; they cling as a half-perished garland that revives again by the wells and streams from which they drink. Deep too are the sweet odours of the mild cow mother, for milk is scented with the recollections of childhood and of human love. "That Daphnis am I who here do herd the kine, Daphnis who waters here the bulls and calves." Not often, perhaps, do these half-Indian people dream of romance, but sometimes as night falls and the fires gleam more brightly may be heard the pleading of the guitar and the accents of a lover's song.

Now while speaking of cattle, and especially of cows, I may note what to some seems almost a human instinct. No instinct however strong in one variety of life but has its like or counterpart in others. I spoke of their dignity of movement. Strange it seems that the great human passion for precedence should cause that dignity to vanish in indignation. I often noted when milking in Australia and California that the cows entered and left the stock-yard or corral in a set order. If any broke the rule she was horned mercilessly and never used her horns in defence. She knew, in fact, that she had broken a law of the tribe. The first to enter might horn all the rest, and so downward until the last in dignity and place had none to turn on, but took her low position as though she was some poor knight's lady in the presence and company of the coroneted.

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Steers rarely trouble about these matters, but then with the loss of one great instinct the pride that bulls own may go with it. Yet when we watched a herd of some six hundred cows passing on the Chinandega Road with four or five bulls among them one bull betrayed bad judgment and a peculiar lack of dignity. He challenged a bigger bull, locked horns with him, struggled for a few seconds, and then, turning about, ran away bellowing with rage and what seemed like shame. But the nature of a bull is to be ready for war, and often as he walks ponderously he seems to reflect on past battles and think of those that may come at any time. So he bends his ponderous head and moans his subdued challenge without pawing the ground. That, indeed, is the very gage of imminent battle.

Milking and cattle breeding were the prime things on Cosigüina. Horses are bred there to serve the campistas and the work of the ranch. A few unhappy sheep, whom no one wished to eat and thereby end their unnatural lives, wandered about the precincts of the ranch-house. Beef does not appear to pall on the Central American. In Australia the cattlemen used to pine for mutton, but I rarely heard a mutton-eater clamour for beef. Occasionally a pig is killed at Cosigüina, but the main purpose of the pigs seemed to be a breeding ground for niguas. In Castellani's *Tropical Medicine*, a book not to be recommended to the

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nervous traveller, the student who wished to catch and study the jigger is recommended to catch a young white pig first and hold him down. On his white skin the pin-point black specks can be seen and captured. Unluckily I used to find them on my own feet. They run with great rapidity. But it never seems to occur to anyone to abolish the pig : to do so would reduce the jigger's breeding grounds. With care these fleas, a bitter importation from Brazil, might perhaps be eradicated. However, no one seems to mind them much. There are often plagues of ticks, or *garrapatas*. Though none troubled me one got hold of N. There are many Arachnidæ, including scorpions, one of which I found on my bed, and big mygales. One mygale, which lines its nest with hair, is supposed to cut its material from the coronet of horses' hoofs and then, by way of payment, to bite the donor and give him a very serious disease of the hoofs. Richard Belt accepted this, but it is now known that the poor spider has nothing to do with equine disease. It is due to a fungus which penetrates into the hoof and sets up an inflammation which, unless it is treated, may cause the loss of the hoof in horses and mules. Care and free drainage through the frog obviates this disaster. When I stated the facts to Don José and Anselmo, the latter obviously regarded me as a pestilential liar, and I do not believe I recovered his esteem until I taught him a new knot

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which might be used to adorn bridles and saddlery. All Spanish Americans like working in leather and are great admirers of fine horse furniture. A Mexican without a *real* to his name may have enough worked leather and silver about his horse and his hat to stock a small farm. And silver bell-spurs, which ring as he swaggers on foot, make a poor man feel like a hero, a millionaire, and a true caballero.

Central Americans, as far as I could observe them, are more merciful to horses than many less mixed Spaniards. The wounds and sore backs of horses in the Canary Islands are sickening. I have often rejected animals brought for me to ride. The owners will smear over a huge raw place with black grease so that it cannot be seen without examination. I always had the saddle removed before I mounted. The Portuguese are, on the other hand, animal lovers. In Madeira every horse and bullock shines. The boys cut sugar-cane to give to their charges. A Portuguese hotel-keeper in the Canaries said to me, "These accursed Spaniards are cruel; they are not Christians." He almost wept, and spat viciously.

Taken all through America from Alaska to Patagonia the horses, unless especially bred, are not very fine animals. In size, spirit and even endurance they cannot compete with the ordinary Australian horse. Most bronchos, cayuses, cow-ponies and the like are hardy. I shall possibly

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run across the snag of common opinion if it is said that horses in America rarely buck in the sense that an Australian understands buck-jumping. They mostly "pig-jump," that is, they see-saw up and down and cover a lot of ground. A really vicious Australian buck-jumper will buck for many minutes on a piece of ground no bigger than a common carpet and then begin again. To keep this up requires enormous power. To sit such an animal requires uncommon horsemanship. Most riders end in going blind, and find themselves on the ground. When a horse tucks in his head and tail and jumps three feet into the air and comes down in the same spot a hundred times this is no wonder. Numbers of rough riders end with hernia. I have known a man sit a horse of this kind till the blood ran out his nose. When his mount quietened down at last and stood still in absolute exhaustion his rider had to be lifted off. There was no "minute and a half" riding in such a feat. I do not pretend to sit such an animal. To do that training must begin in early boyhood and be continuous. But I have tried and been thrown, and know enough to be sure that American "bucking" is a comparatively mild test of horsemanship. Sometimes we see picked American riders here. I want some of them to visit Australia.

Every cowboy or campista is supposed to be able to use "the rope," *la reata*, lariat or *lazo*. Most of them can in a way. But any degree of real skill

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is rare. Not one in a hundred was dexterous, even in the old days when cowboys "rode the line" in a norther in an unfenced country. I doubt if there was an expert hand at it on all Cosigüina. The men we have seen in England are as much trained specialists as ever was Cinquevalli. We might as well ask the ordinary billiard-player to balance two billiard balls on the point of his cue as ask the average "cow-man" to emulate the achievement of the late artificial "rodeo." Shows and films falsify life for the most part. Those who are reckoned dead shots hit space rather than any target. Few men acquire more skill than serves or is likely to serve their turn. Some are experts, but their stage is now properly the music hall. Barbed wire has destroyed the old order of the open prairie. It carries on a ghostly existence before the camera. A man like Colenbrander was drowned in an African river to make a film. Had the cinema existed in Napoleon's time the fallen Emperor might have a new immortality as a "movie" star of enormous wealth, and have thus paid "reparations" to a triumphant Europe.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LIFE ON A NICARAGUAN ESTANCIA

Jaguars and pumas. An alligator brought in. Fishermen and *caymans*. Birds in Rio Grande. Natural selection. The *quetzal*. Theory of transmission. The *pisoti*. Leaf-cutting ants. Army ants, a tragedy. The bull's-horn thorn. Flies and sand-flies. Castillo talks. The "Republic of Cosigüina." Death and the people. "Que manda?"

A JAGUAR had more or less been promised me on Cosigüina. I never saw so much as the tracks of this big tree-cat. Some were fabled to exist in the forests of the volcano, but none had been seen for years. The puma, which I had known as the *cougar* in British Columbia, was equally rare or non-existent. The cattle, therefore, had few enemies, though many calves die of dysentery. Occasionally an alligator in one of the warm swamps or streams gets a cow or calf which comes to drink. Once a wretched bull was caught by the nose. The struggle must have been horrible, for though the animal broke away there was nothing to do but kill it.

The alligator, *el lagarto*, or "the lizard," keeps very close when men are about. In the rivers he lies openly on sand-spits, but is quick to get into the

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water when danger is threatened. We noticed big ones in the Motagua, but the only live one that I saw on Cosigüina was lassoed by one of the men, tied up, gagged, and drawn miles to the ranch. I believe this was done to give me pleasure. If so it failed. Everyone was much surprised when I wished the poor devil shot. One man, who afterwards proved more of a brute than others, kicked the alligator in the belly. He seemed to think it might be righteously tortured. Many seamen hold the same view as regards sharks.

The alligators, or caymans, of the Atlantic and Pacific Coast are said to show specific differences. They are probably varieties, altered by the environment. The more an observer gets away from the atmosphere of a museum and the logic of a text-book or lecture room the less weight he is likely to attach to the view that all changes have what is called "survival value." Any theory which makes trivial colour changes and the like vital in survival perishes in the open air.

Knowledge of crocodiles in the Nile and elsewhere makes most people imagine that crocodiles and alligators are entirely fresh-water reptiles. This is not so. The stream and swamps of Cosigüina hold plenty. I saw their tracks in mud and the vast imprints of their scaly bodies on sand when they came out to sun themselves. But the muddy *esteros*, or great sea-water shallows, adjoining the

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Pacific and the Gulf were full of them. Obviously they lived mostly on fish. We visited the camp of some poor fishermen who had a camp on one of these esteros, and they showed us the bones of hundreds which they had harpooned and apparently eaten. The taste of the meat is musty and disagreeable, although one of the Spaniards who conquered America and is quoted by Cunningham Graham in *The Conquest of the River Plate* said it was delicious. I have heard of negroes in Louisiana and Florida digging alligators out of the mud and eating their tails. Perhaps fasting improves the flavour. It may be, however, that the Spanish epicure mistook the flesh of one lizard for that of another.

The iguana is certainly palatable, and is eaten all over Central America. As I said earlier, the natives catch them, dislocate their legs, and bring them in alive to market. This is not very agreeable to see, and when the brute who kicked the alligator brought a live and helpless iguana in and dumped it in the doorway of my room there was a certain amount of trouble.

The alligators rarely catch a human being. They know man as their greatest enemy and avoid him. Occasionally they get a woman washing clothes or a stray baby dabbling in the water. Where many bathe together the reptile rarely ventures. N. and I bathed in hot streams with many within a hundred

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yards or so. But it might be dangerous to bathe there at night.

To go from the extreme of prehistoric hideousness to that of beauty, my great disappointment in Central America arose from the scarcity of humming-birds. I think I saw three. One of these had been caught in the kitchen of our best friend in Guatemala City. The native cook amused herself by capturing it, cutting its wings, throwing it up and catching it. Her mistress found her at this game and took the poor bird away. It died in a few hours. I saw none on Cosigüina, though the swamp, known grandiloquently as El Rio Grande, seemed an ideal place for them. Their absence was in a measure made up for by a flock of white ibises with pink curved bills. They haunted the streams and pools and were very tame. In one warm pool there was almost always a grey heron, who stood rigidly still as we rode past him, and might easily have been mistaken for something else and overlooked. Outside the swampy forest were flocks of scissor-tails, which hawked for flies and were specially active as the sun went down. A number of "black-birds" with scarlet under the wings often stayed on the far side of the swamp. There were in the wood numbers of little rock doves which nested on the far volcano. The black sopilotes always occupied some trees, and I saw a few falcons and parrots. I have never seen it noted that parrots appear to be strictly

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monogamous. They seem to make excellent wives and husbands and are always together in couples. A single bird is rarely seen. In the early morning they flew in pairs over the hacienda to their feeding grounds, and at night came back so close to each other that they sometimes seemed one bird. Macaws are also seen in couples, and they frequently make a tremendous noise. Such birds may well set us wondering whether natural selection is not rather a species-destroyer than a species-maker. All the parrots are excellent food for any bird of prey, and are highly conspicuous. In spite of that, many species are practically left alone by all the hawks, and in consequence of this immunity have developed great colour and ornament. This, perhaps, may suggest that seclusion and in-breeding in some particular habitat favour variation and the production of new species. I think it might be said truthfully that if in any country showing varied conditions natural selection were reduced to a minimum we should get far more species than in a normally trying environment. The view, supported by Wallace and Hudson but not generally accepted, that colour and adornment of all kinds are the results of surplus energy seems very reasonable. Why then are not eagles and falcons ornamented? I take it that the answer must be that their energy goes into their main structure and their exceptionally violent functions of flight and capture. The brilliant and rowdy

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macaw seems to be something of a loafer and gets his food easily. Everyone must have noticed that they are some of the happiest birds in captivity. They sit and shriek and sun themselves. That is all they want if they are well fed. But hawks and eagles are miserable prisoners. I have said nothing of the Central American *quetzal* or *quezal* (*Pharomacrus mocino*). This is now a rare bird. Its resplendent plumage has almost destroyed it. It forms the crest of Guatemala, and since it dies in captivity it is looked on as a symbol of liberty. There is a legend that when the last great Indian chief died a quetzal came and died upon his breast. In Guatemala it is forbidden to kill it, and specimens may be bought in the shops for ten dollars. In a private house I saw one stuffed and perishing, the gorgeous golden green of the long tail feathers had faded. There are still many in the more secret places of Honduras, but like the egret it is doomed to die for collectors and women without mercy.

In this book I cannot discuss big biological problems. But at least a word may be said as to the problem known as the transmission of acquired or altered characteristics. The orthodox say a variation caused by the environment cannot be transmitted. This is mainly the view of the museum philosopher. Life in the open contradicts it. A single variation may certainly be "swamped," but if the environment causes changes, visible or

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invisible, in a company or class of animals then the tendency to change exists in all and cannot be swamped. By the steady influence of the environment it should be reinforced. We have to get away from the wholly absurd belief that every perpetuated variation must be useful. It may be harmless, it may even be harmful, and yet in the end made use of. Are some strong-billed birds nut-eaters because they began by eating nuts and found stronger bills of survival value? Can we not say that they took to cracking nuts because they had strength of bill, which increased by exercise and inheritance? Are weak-billed birds weak-billed because their weak and slender bills are useful to catch little insects with? Why not say that they eat what they can with what they possess and change, if they do change, in a different environment?

I may note that I only saw one pisoti (*Nasua fusca*) or ground-raccoon, while in Cosigüina. They often hunt in packs. Of the white-tailed deer (*Cervus virginianæ*) I came across four. Hunting is done on Cosigüina, but the result is not great. Occasionally a brush turkey can be shot. I shot nothing, and did not try to. The older I get the less I am inclined to slaughter, though probably a jaguar might have tempted me.

Observations of the leaf-cutting ants (*Oecoma*) may seem otiose in the presence of Bates and Belt, but when I found leaf-cutters at work in another

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Cosigüina forest all that I saw did not wholly tally with Belt. He says that the pieces of leaf they carry are mostly about the size of a sixpence. I was surprised to note that most which came under my own notice carried minute fragments, twenty of which might have been laid on that coin. One, indeed, carried a huge burden about the size of a shilling. I lifted the piece of leaf and the ant held on. When I put him down he was at first confused, but soon went on again, banging his heavy load against small obstructions. Nothing seemed to depress him ; and the last I saw of him was the big green leaf being carried like a triumphant banner overshadowing those with the tinier leaf fragments. Belt also says that the big officers or "foremen" or warrior ants are only seen in migrations or whenever there is trouble. I noted some superintending a peaceful part of the line. The nests of these ants are sometimes acres in extent. It would seem that the savage army ants of whatever species leave them alone. They may not be good to eat.

The greatest and most horrible tragedy we saw in Central America was wrought by a large body of army ants, probably *Eciton legionis*. A tragedy does not always depend on the size of those who suffer or those who inflict it. There are few things more ghastly in any form of life than that act of the female spider who lures, uses, and then destroys her successful but fated consort. N. and I were

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riding in a dry forest on the other side of the Rio Grande and I dismounted to pick a flower. Close beside the plant was a tree with an inclined trunk about nine inches in diameter. N. drew my attention to some big red ants upon it. They were fully half an inch long and in a great state of agitation. It seemed as if their nest was built in the hollows of the tree, which was partly decayed. I looked down, and to my surprise saw a swarm of blackish ants at the root of the tree. An advance party came up with great rapidity, and was followed by the dense black main body of the army. The upper part of the tree was now alive with the bigger red ants. Most carried white pupæ in their mouths and were in no case to fight. It seemed that they knew that nothing but flight could serve them or the future of their colony. But flight was useless and escape there seemed none. Yet in the end a few escaped, some I think by design and more by accident. For some fell from the ends of branches, and all the Ecitons being then on the tree they could get away. A few I shook off myself. The motility of the "reds" was marvellous. The blacks had no chance in a mere race. But whenever a red ant ran close to a black one he turned away and, meeting another, once more swerved, never letting go his precious burden, to which desperate instinct held him. At last he had no loophole of escape, and an Eciton caught hold of him. The attacker was carried away, but

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bit savagely. Then another and another joined in. Soon there was a heap like that of a miniature football "scrum." The red ant heaved up his torn body and was then dismembered, disembowelled and eaten on the spot. I saw two black ants take a wing. They ate what flesh there was at the base and let it go and joined the others. Now the red ants took to the branches, even to the topmost twigs, but every branch and limb grew black. The Ecitons searched every crack and cranny and tore their prey from the deepest holes. In a few minutes there was not a red ant left upon the tree, and the satiated tribe of raiders swarmed back upon the ground. These are the ways of ants. I found them not so much unlike the ways of men. My interest was deep, but the scene depressing.

However well known the country may be to naturalists, nothing on the forest of Nicaragua would be complete without some reference to the bull's-horn thorn. Those who wish to see the *Acacia spinosa* thoroughly described can refer to Belt. I may say here that the ants (*Pseudomyrma bicolor*) attach themselves to this special acacia, eat out the inside of the soft little spines and make their nest inside. But instead of remaining a mere spine the thorn now grows very large and takes on a shape much like a bull's, or rather a big steer's, horns. In each there is the original hole of entry. The ants defend their tree from the leaf-cutters, and I do not think

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the Ecitons could carry out any attack on these artificially formed fortresses. Strange as are the habits of these ants, I do not think they are as strange as the alteration in the thorns. Since without the ants the spines remain mere spines, some naturalists may say that such changes have nothing to do with environmental influence and the vexed question of transmission of altered characteristics. I cannot agree with them. The changes are marked and exceedingly definite. A bull's-horn thorn is as recognisably the result of a definite environmental influence as a gall upon a tree. And every gall caused on a particular tree by the same agent has similar characteristics. We can therefore say that the morphology of the thorn depends on the ant, and possibly on formic acid acting as an inciter of growth. These changes are gross and the agents are visible, but if the whole of the phenomena do not suggest that form change may be due, and indeed very often must be due, to definite environmental influences, I am unable to see what reasonable and really likely explanation can be offered. When I come to speak of the *Amate*, or *Ficus*, of Central America I shall have something more to say of the bull's-horn acacia.

There were times at the ranch that one asked for a house-cleaning by army ants. Where they come nothing lives which cannot fly. The bugs, the cuerduro, the cockroach, the armed scorpion

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and the mygale all succumb. The place has been "vacuumed," and men sleep in peace if mosquitoes are rare. Our cockroaches and the like were kept down by small iguanas, or "geckos." Caceres, the Don's chauffeur-factotum, thought them deadly. He found one in my room and tried to kill it. "Muy peligroso!" he shouted. It was "very dangerous." It was truly as harmless as a mouse. I rescued it and threw it outside into the long grass. But after all, though the weather was hot the insects were not very worrying. Mosquitoes and flies were comparatively rare. In some countries they would have rendered life unendurable. In Texas I have had blow-flies blow on my meat on my very fork. Ordinary flies come to drink at the moisture of one's eyes and get trapped as one winks. The worst pest on Cosigüina was the sand-fly, the *jijena* (*Phlebotomus papasii*) the carrier of Pappataaci, or sand-fly fever. Here it was not carrying the germ, but the tiny pests, which are barely visible, came in thousands about sun-down and bit everyone's ankles till the irritation was maddening. Hot as it was, I put on a very heavy pair of socks over lighter ones and tucked my trousers into them. These or putties may serve to keep them off. They are a terrible pest to horses, especially to those with short tails. I have seen the hairless inner aspect of a horse's thigh grey with them and the horse nearly mad. Luckily we were in Nicaragua during the dry season.

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When it rains insect life is much more trying and abundant. But niguas and sand-flies seem to flourish in the dry places. But for these Cosigüina is comparatively free of things which make life a burden. The absence of standing water largely accounts for this. On most of the potreros the cattle were watered at wells which helped to keep them near the queserias, and also rendered them tame and easy to handle.

Not being a professed general entomologist, or even coleopterist, I own that the people about the estancia were more interesting to me than the insects. I have spoken of the patriarchal element on Cosigüina. Don José was the *patron*, the master, friend and doctor, and I saw no sign of any revolt against his kindly rule. When he was there did he not look after the brown babies, luckily in that locality with little of the prevalent hook-worm, and if a man hurt himself badly, a very rare thing, could he not operate? In the first chapter I told the story of the campisto who ripped himself open on a barbed-wire fence. These people make wonderful patients, and are miracles of real health. I have known of a negro in a West African mine with a similar abdominal disaster. On seeing the surgical instruments he held himself together, ran off, jumped a three-foot fence, and was only caught and brought back after a long chase. He also recovered. With simple people a physician or a surgeon has a big pull, and

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Indian blood carries faith in "medicine men" to an extreme. With many patients "believe and be saved" works more miracles than drugs or knives or sutures. At times some of us had undue faith in curious machines and worked hard and vainly to get results. One was a churn which Castillo "demonstrated" to N., and then got her to work at while he chattered of America. But perspiration was all the "gadget" produced. Then we had a queer sort of freezer which produced nothing but heat and curses in all who touched it. It was constructed of jiggling bottles and a reservoir of strong sulphuric acid. I suppose the scheme was to produce a vacuum. It emptied us of all energy.

At night-time, when various patent lamps, with the patent's passion for sudden flare or failure, were hung about the verandah, the patron sat in a hammock and smoked, and N. and I read or listened to the talk of José and Anselmo or perhaps half a dozen others leaning on the rail. It seemed necessary to the working of the ranch to hold "palavers." Sometimes José spoke humorously of the Republic of Cosigüina. Though wages are low and the campistas get nothing but their six dollars a month and their food, they all looked on themselves as part of the place. There was autocracy here and democracy mingled. Everyone appeared to have a right to speak. I caught little of what was actually said, but sometimes José turned to me and told me what

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the subject was. Even without knowing it, the dimly-lighted scene and the glow of cigars, incredibly bad *puros*, the low voices and the picturesque half-vagabond crowd at the rail gave one great pleasure. And outside was the light of the moon, and ghostly women paced by with water-jars and the well-tackle creaked, while many dogs and pigs and the sad sheep wandered about in the sand or under the tangled amate where a dozen cocks and their harems roosted. It is true that the peace was sometimes broken by the loud outcries of "Prince Alberto," the noisy brat belonging to one of the cooks, for the fat and naked prince was allowed to stay up as long as he pleased. We were glad when he and his mother went into exile. The cook who remained begged to be allowed to sleep in the office, as the prince's mother held her responsible for the dismissal and talked of knives and revenge. The new help brought a baby girl, "Concepcion," who was a dear, but upset everyone by getting lost in the bush half-way to Anselmo's house.

But I have wandered from the verandah. And then Doña Eva called "Clementina," and her faithful maid replied instantly from some far distance, "Que manda?" or "What orders?" Or it may be José wanted his henchman Caceres, and called aloud for him, and the same ready answer came. It was wonderful the amount that Caceres got through, though none of it on Cosigüina was

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connected with a car. What an English chauffeur would say to being made a man of all and every work puzzled me. But after all I am not discussing the ways of aristocrats newly risen to rank and power. Sometimes Monte Alegre's man Castillo, who prided himself on his English, learnt and mislearnt in the United States, leant against the rails and related to N. with pride in a wild linguistic compost the story of his life. He also explained the theory of a carbide lamp and darkened the subject dreadfully. He told her that the lamp worked by "explosion." From the way it acted this appeared very likely. N. as patient as a student over a thrice inscribed palimpsest, listened and sometimes tried to teach him the right pronunciation of words, which he repeated and instantly forgot. But though he talked ninety-nine to the dozen, he worked hard and was quick as a chipmunk and cheerfully willing. Nearly everyone was able to smile easily except Aguilar, the man who kicked the alligator, and old Nicholas the water-carrier, who seemed to feel his age and was greyly solemn. Sometimes we rode past him in the forest, carrying on mule-back his two huge tin *cantaras*. For all our drinking water came from Deschamps' saw-mill, where it was distilled. He looked like the shadow of some poor Don Quixote. Then too there was the sad-looking storekeeper and timekeeper Joaquin, lately left a widower with small children. He never smiled.

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Many of these kindly people seem to regard death as an opportunity for a festive party. It breaks the monotony of life, and the funeral ends in drink and dancing and the music of the guitar, while the poor mother, maybe, cannot yet dry her tears. Once in Nicaragua an Englishman was invited to take a part in the ceremonies following the death of a little child. He was prevented from going, and some days afterwards met the bereaved father. "I'm sorry I could not come after all," said the gringo. "So was I, señor," was the answer. "We enjoyed ourselves very much!" He seemed a little gloomy. He was sorry because the Englishman had missed the festival. But presently he cheered up and said hopefully, "It can't be helped, señor; perhaps you can come some other time. Another child isn't looking at all well!"

Doña Eva was not always with us on the verandah in the evening. A very faithful child of her church, she sat apart sometimes in the little "office" and read. So devoted and kindly a mother must have often thought of her children far off in the Earthquake City. But she was the pleasantest hostess and as hard a worker as all must be in a place where people say, "Si, señora," and go away and do nothing. Sometimes she and N. sat together and taught each other Spanish and English, though Doña Eva knew more of our tongue than her shyness permitted her to use.

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So perhaps the moon went down and a dark night and a cool came breathing over us as we separated with thoughts of the morrow. And after I was under the mosquito curtain I sometimes heard, "Clementina!" and the swift echo, "Que manda?" Doña Eva had thought of something else to help us the next day.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE VOLCAN COSIGUINA

The *Salina*. *Pescadores*. Birds and crabs. A ride to the Pacific. Thirst and water. The *hojacigüe*. Alcohol. The *siesta*. Hens. A seduction. Baths. The *polvacion*. Fall of dust. Riding up the volcan. Size and shape of crater. The crater lake. Mental effect of Cosigüina.

IT is easy to understand how some, whose memories might be a productive garden, sink down into the past and, becoming subjective lotos-eaters, tell none their visions of the past. So hard it is to weave into a pattern a myriad things seen and heard, even when they are but the products of a little fertile volcanic dust and the little dramas of little men. In some Oriental patterns faces of people and animals are woven together and turn one into another, after the fashion of a mutable dream. And strangely enough the drawings of some madmen (I have seen a mad melancholy artist sit and draw) are of a like quality and management. Here, as I may imagine myself back in Cosigüina, things work out like that—ants and men and naked babies, and alligators' bones and flying birds and poor dead beasts, and sunsets and dawns, and palms golden in the noon, and the depths of forests, and

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volcanic peaks with stars high above them. To weave something in writing from the intricate web of memory is to choose one memory from a thousand, and the only easy way it can be done is to forget the greater part of all we have seen, an inevitable but friendly disaster.

José loved to show us his wide country, and I began to perceive how pleasant it might be to ride long miles, even in the summer's dust, and think that by the favour of Fate these miles were one's own. So we went many rides, though all the time we talked of the main one yet to come, the ascent of the *volcan*, the little but terrible and dramatic peak which gave the ranch its name. But before doing that we went to the *Salina*, and saw men there making a glittering high pile of salt from mud. Right in the glaring open by the salt-pan, overflowed at high tides by the salt estero, stood a big mound of earth, and on it a cistern kept full of water drawn from a well. The earth from the pan was wheeled up there in barrows and puddled in the cistern. When the mud settled the heavy brine was drawn off into a receptacle and there evaporated over a primitive furnace, fired with wood. To look at the white pile of salt hurt the eyes. What it must be to tend the fire in the tropic sun I could guess, for over forty-five years ago I had burnt piles of cut harmful weeds on the torrid Austral plains. I went out to the *Salina* twice afterwards

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with N. and visited the fishermen. We talked with these poor men, who lived with their women-folk in a savage little camp, lumbered up with piles of maize and maize cobs and dried fish, where hammocks were slung from the trees. One wizened man with a most courteous manner and an eager desire to satisfy our curiosity, took us through the wood and by the mud beach fringed with dead and dying trees to the place where they harpooned alligators, mostly young ones, whose skeletons strewed the shore. The ground here was alive with what he called *visperas*, or wasps. They probably mimicked greenish wasps, but were quite harmless and rarely flew more than six inches above the ground. I could not see what they were hunting or hawking for. The last time we went we sat down among alligators' bones and dead and dying mangroves by the mud of the estero, then at ebb. White water-birds sparkled in the distant pools, but near at hand I noticed that the very mud seemed alive, though all motion ceased if I threw in a stick. I therefore watched quietly, and presently saw that the mud was wonderfully full of hideous little mud-coloured crabs, shaped after the manner of the Calling Crab (*Gelasimus*). But the big land Calling Crab holds up his claw in the air to save strain as he moves, and these estero crabs seemed to hold their one big claw, which was nearly the size of their whole body, close against themselves.

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They were mostly about one-half to five-eights of an inch long, and there must have been billions of them, for acres of visible wet mud close to us flickered when they moved. It is easy to imagine that anything dead there, a mouse or a mammoth, would soon be but bones. Their extreme caution was probably due to their fear of wading birds. They buried themselves in the mud as swiftly as Keeble describes the descent of *Convoluta Roscoffensis* sinking when the flood tide comes in. The last time we visited the *Salina* and the estero the fishing camp was asleep, and we did not disturb any of the resting *pescadores*. They were a courteous, kindly people, very poor and simple.

Some days after this Anselmo and I rode with José out of his property and across Deschamps' ranch to the Pacific. On the westward path we did not stay at his saw-mill, but passed onward through interminable forest land, here more open, and there as thick as trees and lianas could make it. There was some fine timber on the way, a few caobas, or mahogany, conicaste, or guanacaste, jenisaros, and the splendid but useless ceiba, with its buttressed trunk, and many cruel crawling amates. We came to low hills and deep valleys and here and there a trickling stream, and at last to flats of reeds and whitish willows or cottonwoods, and then again to mangrove, and suddenly to the Pacific shore. The great ocean, which for ever affords a thrill to its

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re-discoverer if he has any touch of historic feeling or of literature in him, was calm as on the day in November, 1520, when Magellan gave it a name, and very blue and lovely to behold. I had not yet ventured to bathe, but its call was so imperative that I stripped and tasted its waters while José and Anselmo sat and smoked on the lonely beach beneath the trees. Is the call of the sea only historic memory? May it not be something deeper? In the Cambrian ages our ancestors were still in it and of it, and Macallum (1904) shows that the salines of the blood in which every body-cell lives and breathes and does its work are of a density that should have been that of the time when "man," not for millions of ages to be man, drew out of the foam and entered on his heritage of the earth. We talk of history, history written or inferred from potsherds or broken traditions. What is this history to that which is written in our very blood? We learn with difficulty, perhaps revolt, that our actions, desires, thoughts, are still conditioned by forgotten things that after all are not forgotten, that our evil characters or our good ones were founded by those, it may be, whose very names and faces we can no longer remember. Little by little we shall learn that these things depend again on events of the early dawn of living matter, it may be on the very nature of the asymmetric carbon atom which in the end must dominate life.

On our return we stayed awhile at Deschamps'

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house, and Mrs. Deschamps gave us something to drink. When one is thirsty water is the finest thing in the world, and when some vinous prater celebrates in dithyrambs the surpassing virtues of alcoholic liquids and denounces water-drinkers, it is plain he never knew real thirst in his life. Let him be truly thirsty, and put him a mile from a clear cold spring and yet another mile from a cask of beer, and it is a thousand to one his drying tissues will draw him to the water. It is true that before we reached the saw-mill I did get a drink of water in the midst of as dry-looking a forest as any can imagine. Anselmo cut a piece three feet long from a liana three inches in diameter, and I held out the brim of my hat to receive a thin stream of pure, clear, tasteless water which trickled from it. This liana is called the *hojachigue*. It has saved many lives, and many men have died no doubt with water close to them that they knew not of. There is even a more abundantly water-bearing liana known as *papamiel*. In Australia it is said that chopped roots of the mallee scrub also yield water to those lost among it, but this I never tried. How foolish it is of people to talk of the necessity of alcohol for workers ! There are few kinds of hard work that I have not seen or done myself, and the hardest work by the healthiest and most enduring men has been done when nothing but water or tea or coffee could possibly be procured. Alcohol is as little

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necessary for man as for a mule or patient ox, and when he takes it he takes a drug and pays for it. Unluckily others pay for it too, and in every country the State, a sleeping partner in its manufacture, is ultimately as much responsible as Salvador is for the rule that *estanco* licencees must sell so much "white-eye" or go. Many who are not teetotal know this, nor does it need a fanatic to see it. There is no argument for alcohol that is not valid for those who sell "snow" in Piccadilly.

One of the beauties of the tropics for those who are naturally gifted with laziness, or more lately acquire it by patient neglect of their duties, is that all work is practically over by noon. There is nothing to be said against those who then retire to bed or a hammock. Nothing, that is to say, by the "boss" or patron who knows the country. In Australia there is no "hammock habit." We worked, however hot it might be, unless indeed the heat was really abnormal, as it was in the summer of 1887-8 in New South Wales. When it rose to  $125^{\circ}$  in the shade for three days there was nothing doing. But I worked with the axe and cross-cut saw in the woods when it was  $115^{\circ}$  and even  $120^{\circ}$ , though we rested then from twelve o'clock to three. On Cosigüina the rule was for us to have lunch and retire at once, José to a hammock and I to bed. In my bed I often found hen's eggs. The hens had the most reckless and immoral habits. Almost

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every day I was called by N. to get eggs from the top of an old bureau. Egg-laying was preceded by the hen trying to scratch a nest in the wood. To have the quiet of the siesta suddenly broken by prolonged clucking and the sudden noisy flight of the egg-producer to the floor was annoying. But there was no controlling the Cosigüina birds. They got on the lunch or dinner table and scratched so vigorously that half the things came off. One hen attacked a big lump of *cajeta*, a local sweet made of sugar, milk, and perhaps a little ground rice, and finally got it and other things on the floor. So Caceres or Castillo had to come and "shoo" them off at intervals, perhaps using a terrible instrument for dispersing dust and raising it again when it had settled. This cyclonic apparatus was a long stick with big strips of cloth attached, and whenever I settled down on the verandah these men or Clementina came and scattered me as well as the comparatively peaceful dust. And while speaking of such minor matters as hens I may note one incident of illicit love among the fowls which seemed to me humorous and yet really remarkable. We talk at large about human psychology, and mostly show our profound ignorance of it, but the psychology of a chicken or a pig is just as interesting. As I sat on the verandah I saw signs of courtship between a young hen and a cock who had no lawful right to approach her. His courtship, though short, was successful. Just

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then the rightful sultan saw what was going on, and came racing across the sand. The young lover fled, and was followed for a few yards by the insulted husband, who presently stopped and, flapping his wings, crowed triumphantly. On considering the matter I thought he had remarkably little to crow about. Still, I was pleased to notice that his ill-founded sense of triumph so satisfied him that he said nothing insulting to the erring hen. I suppose what surprised me most was the reasonableness of the whole thing. Human beings rarely show so much reason.

If I have said nothing so far of the Cosigüina bath and bathroom it deserves a word. It was a wooden building about ten feet square with wide cracks between each plank. The bath was a plank-built coffin-shaped structure capable of holding two hundred and fifty gallons. To get a bath one had to call Caceres or Castillo or both, who drew buckets of water from the well. It was sometimes drawn by Silvester, a campisto who had but one arm. The other had been torn off at the elbow by a *lazo*. The bathroom door took some shutting, but after all why shut it when you could not shut the cracks. Personally I was satisfied with a bucket or two of water, though others took the full coffin and sometimes sat in it eating mangoes. Between the top of the wall and the roof was a space a foot wide. Through this the remains of the mangoes

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were thrown. I first learnt of this by getting a large and hairy mango stone in my eye as I passed the bathroom. This was thrown by—well, after all, it does not matter who threw it.

Let it not be thought that I or anyone else made any complaints about hens or bathroom. Hens meant eggs, and eggs on a man's pillow seem warranted fresh at any rate. And any kind of a bathroom is a luxury in a hot climate. Nor must I be taken to object to the variety of dog-life. The dogs agreed in one thing. They rarely came near us. Their predacious habits had earned them many kicks. This very apparent fear of man led to the only earthquake I experienced in Cosigüina. In an earthquake the earth often rises up quite suddenly. Early one morning when I was half awake my bed rose up beneath me. I said "Earthquake!" The earthquake was the largest dog on the ranch who had come in by the open door and camped under me. When I moved he was alarmed and fled. We talked of earthquakes after that, and speculated as to what the world was like when Cosigüina flared up so long ago. It was settled that the time had come for us to climb the volcan. Very naturally Don José has some pride in possessing one which has shown such enormous capabilities, though it might seem insignificant compared with Agua, El Fuego or San Miguel. It has a reputation that their mud and lava fields cannot equal, though for long

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it has been a sleeping tiger. Old men still remember how their fathers dated all things from the *polvacion*, that awful cloud and shower of dust which spread over the greater part of the narrow neck which joins the two great Americas and extended north to Mexico and south to Bogotá. The sound of the explosion was heard in Jamaica, 800 miles away, and in Guatemala City. Strangely enough, for it will seem strange to those unacquainted with the vagaries of sound, in the nearest town, Chinandega, eighteen leagues to the south, nothing was heard by those who presently found day darker than the night.

Something of these things I learnt from Don José, something from Spanish and English books. The tale of the *polvacion* is wonderful and tragic. The peninsula is again fertile : it was fertile when José's grandfather inherited it from the man who had been wrecked upon its shores and took hold of his courage and of the new land he trod. At Christmas time in 1835 his son was a rich man for those days and looked forward to greater wealth. He owned a thousand cattle and hundreds of horses and occupied a house his father had built. Now none knows its site : perhaps none can find it. A few days after the new year the long silent Cosigüina spoke. There is no clear record of what men felt and heard who dwelt close to the volcano. But darkness lay over the land for days and ashes

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fell without ceasing. Inch by inch and foot by foot they rose, and when at last the light returned the ranch-house was buried under twenty-one feet of drift. He who had been rich was poor: of his herd of a thousand cattle twelve were saved. And eight horses remained to him. He and his family went away to seek a living. It looked as if his prosperity was for ever buried. The ashes that covered all Salvador and a great part at least of Honduras and Guatemala seemed to all the world there an equal disaster. As snow breaks down trees so ashes broke them, and there was a green world no longer, not even one yellow with dried sacate. Over the Republic of Salvador the fall was four inches in depth. But what was looked on as a blight turned out a blessing. Wherever the dust fell fertility increased. The elder Gasteazoro had no need to work long for others. Word came to him soon that the peninsula which at first looked barren, as barren as San Miguel's black lava flood looks now, was waking to life once more. With two seasons' rains a miracle was accomplished. So hard is it in the tropics to stay the flood of life. In two years he was back again, and found the estancia already so capable of fertility that it once more promised fortune. Grass grew and trees sprang again, not only soft ceibas but great hardwoods, for the mightiest trees I saw there do but date from 1835. Eighty-nine years have been sufficient to

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build anew caobas four feet in diameter and equal conicastes. Now, indeed, there is no sign of those four tremendous days. Not a lava field or dyke mars the slopes of grass and scrub and heavy timber trees that clothe the volcan. It stands green and brown and very peaceful, lifting one sharp western peak into the sky, and none fears what is but a spectacle and a legend. It is less than it was before the eruption, perhaps by a thousand feet. The older navigators gave it nearly the height of El Viejo, but at the present day it cannot be more than four thousand feet above the sea. Considering all it did, there is little wonder that its mighty pipe is lessened. Had but a little part of the ash it ejected stayed upon its slope it might have out-towered the bulk of Agua.

José had climbed his volcan many times, and so described the strangeness and fearful beauty of its depths that he inspired us with a great desire to see it. And when I did see it at last I could understand not only the attraction of its beauty and strangeness, but how it came about that he and others exaggerated its size and depth. There are ways of constructing a building so that it shall look larger than its measured dimensions declare it, just as there are ways of diminishing a building's real bulk and power. Of the one London's St. Paul is an example, while the entrances and approaches of St. Peter's in Rome afford a rare example of apparent decrement. It is only from the far-off





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hills that St. Peter's dome stands up and declares its majesty. I found in the volcan something which made it greater and deeper and more fearful than many mightier craters. And José spoke, too, of the coloured lake so deep within it that white divers sailing over its waters looked like mere specks of light. Perhaps of all Central Americans whom I know Don José has the greatest appreciation of natural beauty. Therefore I believed what he told me of his volcan, and was glad when the day came for us to climb it. It might not look so formidable as El Viejo or Momotombo, but many volcanoes keep their secrets close.

As it took rather less than three hours' riding to reach the rim, most of the time over steep and difficult country, we were ordered to be ready at five o'clock in the morning. It is scarcely probable that anyone hoped to get away at that hour, for this was a great and general expedition. N. and I as the visitors were to be shown the sleeping lion of the Peninsula, and everyone, even Clementina, clamoured to accompany us. This time, at least, it was not a case of *menos los mulos*. The mules and horses were ready, saddled and cinched, long before we got away. We took little with us. As we were to be back by luncheon time water and oranges sufficed. The main preparations were really made the day before the start. Ramon and three of his campistas, armed with their machetes, went

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out to see that the trail was clear. They went to the top or, at any rate, beyond the timber line, and came back reporting that all was well. For them it was well, no doubt, but of all possible trails they certainly did not select that which was easiest for the three women, not much accustomed to riding, who were to be of the party.

We started at 5 a.m. by what I call Central American time. That is to say, we left the ranch at 6.15 a.m. Central American time can usually be reckoned as an hour and a half later than the given or appointed time. We may, therefore, be said to have left early. Everyone, even José himself, who is sometimes impatient of national traditions, seemed satisfied that we were, indeed, successful in keeping the correct hour of the departure. It was hard to say how great the distance before us was in miles. Distance is mostly reckoned in time, and any reckoning is difficult among people who seem capable of believing that twice two is three or four according to the political party in power.

Our cavalcade was formidable in numbers. Don José, Doña Eva, N., Monte Alegre and I were, no doubt, the principal figures, but probably not the most picturesque. Anselmo, perhaps about to be appointed the permanent manager, much resembled a fine big type of Indian chief. He sat his horse as though born in the saddle. So did the cheerful and brilliant Ramon, head campisto, not only born

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in the saddle but on the very ranch. Ahead of us or with us were some seven campistas whose bare heels were armed with spurs while they carried their machetes ready for action. Caceres and Clementina were not left behind, nor was Monte Alegre's Castillo. He was always cheerfully ready to go anywhere. Take us all round, I think we numbered seventeen. If seventeen were thus required to climb some 4,000 feet, and the rule of proportion holds good with greater ascents, as I think it does in Central America, what must they have thought of my fairy tale that I went up the Peak of Teneriffe, over 12,000 feet in height, with no more than three mules and two men?

The horses and mules, though hardy, were not lively and ambitious. I own that I found their paces trying, but riding after reaching sixty-five is not like riding at twenty. I never care to use spurs, but without them little can be done, and a mere switch is like fly-tickling to an ordinary mule. But spurs were scarce. Mostly we had one apiece. They were rude and primitive, but not so savage as most Mexican spurs. The campistas were, perhaps, better mounted than some of us. There was a general feeling, or so it seemed to me, that I was still to be taken care of. Therefore my mule, though sure-footed and sturdy, was one which needed perpetual stimulation.

Our campistas worked hard with their machetes,

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and assisted each other valiantly in losing the best way to the top of the volcano. At first the path was easy, as it led for about a mile over a level or dusty cattle-trodden trail. We passed into thin and then into thicker bush, interspersed, as the trail rose, with beds of rattling dry cane-brakes, and came at last to something like true forest, consisting chiefly of the formidable spinous cedar, some four feet in diameter at the butt, armed everywhere with savage sharp thorns. But now my chief interest was in the procession itself and the characters of our friends and companions. I said to N., "We might be the advance party of a comic revolution. Look at the flashing machetes! And almost all of us carry a 'gun.' Politically we might be suspicious if we had not been in the wilderness, and I do not think a Central American policeman would believe we meant to do anything so meaningless as climb a hill." Indeed, most people in these countries would almost as soon commit suicide as scramble higher than a necessary road leads them, unless they believed themselves on the track of some treasure or were flying for their lives. Whymper noted in the Andes that everyone thought none but a fool would climb hills for anything but hidden gold.

In half an hour we began to catch glimpses of the Gulf of Fonseca across the eastern shoulder of Cosigüina. The island of El Tigre emerged. Behind its bulk was Amapala. El Viejo, "the old

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man," rose majestically to the south, and San Miguel's cleft truncated cone shone in the north. The water of the Gulf was blue and opal shot-silk, and the shallower esteros showed in delicate greens. A wild mass of nameless Honduranian mountains closed the eastern horizon. To the westward lay the great Pacific of Balboa and Magellan. Many long years ago had I sailed it, but should probably sail it no more. I said farewell to it as an old friend and enemy in one.

And still we climbed through thinning forests, and having somehow missed any possible easy way, got into many difficulties among rocks. Doña Eva's horse almost lost his footing, N.'s came near to rolling upon her, and Don José himself, though on the best mule, came near to a like accident. That the patron should be in difficulties was not to be borne. The whole crowd went to his assistance, though truly he had no need of it. My mule was no genius, but I had had enough experience to let him pick his own way. Most accidents in bad places are due to the rider interfering with his mount's judgment. The last thing a horse likes doing is to fall, and he rarely does it with a loose rein. Finally, we came out of the thinning scrub and the rocks to a clearer slope which, though steep, was without dangers. I urged my mule to hurry and got ahead of the others, reaching the crater first or, at least, second.

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Everyone now screamed entreaties to me not to go near the edge. Only last year part of that very cliff had given way with a roar like thunder which was heard at the ranch and beyond it. Truly I found cracks in the ground beneath me, but since the chances of disaster were remote I disregarded all advice, and standing on the extreme beetling verge looked down into an incredible gulf in the solid earth.

According to the chart of the Gulf of Fonseca, published by the U.S.A. Hydrographic Department, the crater itself is not of extraordinary magnitude. The old crater of Teneriffe is at least twelve miles from wall to wall across the Cañadas, and any entering it through the Portillo might not at once perceive that this gateway is a huge breach in the ancient rampart, and that the vast open space before him, with its slopes of pumice and rapilli, was the floor or hollow of the ancient crater. Cosigüina's crater is but a mile across its shorter axis and a mile and an eighth across the longer one. But I found the depth hard to guess, impossible to determine. To discover it would need instruments and much calculation. To me, indeed, it seemed as deep as it was wide, but the eye is not so accustomed to measure depth or height as distance on a horizontal plain. The southern wall is, however, almost perpendicular for perhaps two thousand feet. Had it been quite perpendicular I might have found its depth by dropping a stone and using a well-known

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formula. But at the end of six seconds the stone touched the rock face, and bounding from it dropped again and was lost to sight. On the other side the natural slopes, which are touched with a green growth, are too steep to descend without danger. At the very bottom of the Gulf lies a lake which must be some two hundred acres in extent. It shone in the sun, a smooth expanse of water of the colour known as *eau-de-Nile*. I saw a bird, the merest speck of white, floating above its surface. José told me that with a glass he had seen birds catch fish there. They must have originated from ova brought on the webbed feet of divers, for the local belief that the lake is connected with the sea is a delusion. The water in the lake is a mighty rain-gauge of the rains that have fallen here since 1835, if we allow for evaporation.

There were too many about me for contemplation. In a crowd we do but perceive the obvious, and cannot absorb beauty or possess our souls. I went alone towards the higher jagged western wall and sat down in quiet. For a few moments two mighty grasshoppers, which took to flight with great scarlet under-wings, drew me away, but I turned again to the volcan. There is a great, a very tremendous air of majestic and lovely peace about the historic and once terrible crater. It looks like the home, the last wonderful refuge, of eternal silence in this unpeaceful country. Though it is lifted so little

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above the shining silver of the Pacific and the Gulf it has a power and an effect beyond that of many greater mountains or of any volcano that I have seen. Although it is now so ineffably quiet, some of these feelings come from a knowledge of what it has accomplished. To look down this vast pipe, which did such dreadful work, made life and the great stability of the globe itself things of doubt and fear.

But very swift is the return of life under the tropical sun and rain. Upon the upward forest track to the peak I had wondered at the bulk of many cedars and jenisaros. It was as wonderful as the swift destruction itself to think that Nature had grown her forests here in far less than a hundred years. And once again in this land fire and ashes may destroy and bury them. To sit upon this verge and frontier of space and gaze at the quiet mirror of the lake so far below reminded me of a very different world amphitheatre in which some relative peace now struggled to perpetuate itself, where but lately thunders of applause greeted valour, sacrifice and death. This is a country of fire and earthquake, and from the sharp lifted peak of Cosigüina one sees afar other volcanoes which have wrought later, though less, ruin. They are loftier mountains, but little and terrible Cosigüina bears the most powerful witness of what may be done in this smiling land, and how from some small and disregarded cause disaster may fall on what we call civilisation.

## CHAPTER XV

### EARTHQUAKES AND THE MATEPALO

Causes of earthquakes. The output of volcanoes. Faults. Estimated dust from Cosigüina. Fertility after eruption. Forests renewed. The *amate* or *matepalo*. A strange epiphyte. A swallower of trees. Self-grafting. Wounds and zygosis. Repair. John Hunter and "Consciousness." Parasite influences. Spinous cedar and thorn. *Dendrophyllyum pertusum* and inherited repairs.

IT is not possible to live in an unstable and shaking country where a disaster may occur at any moment without taking an interest in earthquakes, often a painful and nerve-racking interest. To watch a happy crowd and reflect that next minute they may be screaming to their saints, and perhaps asking for a collective catastrophe by approaching their shrines, does not add to the happiness of the moment, for the intelligent observer must be aware that he knows nothing of the way he himself may act. The bravest quail when the solid earth moves, and many of proved courage in war are but cowards when that happens.

I have, however, made no study of earthquakes, and any opinion I might express upon them is not likely to cause a seismic disturbance among seismologists. Nevertheless, it seems to me that

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far too little stress has been laid upon the direct and indirect effects of volcanoes in causing earth disturbances. Judging from the few authorities that I have consulted, the view that there is any direct connection between them has been put aside. It is held that slow movements, always in progress, have great rending effects at last. No doubt this is true, and in geology catastrophic movements have been overworked as cause. But if geologic "faults," or dislocations of continuous strata, are appealed to in their place, we can ask legitimately whether such "faults" in many cases may not be due to volcanic action. A volcano is, of course, a means of relieving internal stress. A local eruption may possibly stand in place of a more general upheaval. But is it not possible for an eruption, unaccompanied at the time by anything more than rumblings and tremors in distant places, to have terrible results long years afterwards?

There was no great earthquake in 1835. Cosigüina may have released pent-up forces. But have no subsequent earthquakes been due to the eruption? Whence did all the erupted matter come? How much was it? How was the newly-created hollow in the earth filled up? None of these questions can be answered in definite terms, but I have made some very rough calculations which suggest a minimum amount of the actual matter discharged from Cosigüina. To get accurate data

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is impossible, but it is known that about four inches of dust fell over Salvador, which is 7,000 square miles in extent. This means that 180 tons, taking a cubic yard as a ton, fell on each acre. The total amount that fell on Salvador was about 830,000,000 tons or cubic yards. Without taking into account what fell in Guatemala and beyond it and that which floated in a south-easterly direction, we may without much hesitation assume that an equal fall occurred all over a half-circle, of which Cosigüina was the centre and the distance from it to Lake Guija the half diameter. The area of such a semi-circle is about 48,000 square miles. Then in that half circle there fell nearly 5,000,000 tons or cubic yards. In a cubic mile there are roughly about 5,500,000,000 cubic yards. Within a little more space than the supposed half-circle it appears that Cosigüina blew out a cubic mile of matter in four days. But this is really absurdly little. The old estancia house, miles from the volcano, was buried under twenty-one feet of dust and ashes. If only nine feet fell over the 400 square miles of the ranch another 3,600,000,000 tons must have fallen there. But the ranch is not half the peninsula, and I have totally neglected the south-eastern semi-circle. It seems as if the total blow-out must at least have been from two and a half to five cubic miles. And how much compressed and fiery gas did all this work? Unless the newly-created hollow was instantly filled up

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there must have been vast caverns created, probably with far ramifications. Would not such caverns create the very conditions in which new faults must occur? But settlement might be deferred for years. I see no inherent improbability in the conclusion that the latest Guatemala City and San Salvador earthquakes may have been due to a series of changes initiated in 1835 by Cosigüina. And if that small pipe in the earth's crust can do so much, what might be wrought by some volcano to which Cosigüina is but a little, if dangerous, *fumarole*?

If earthquakes and volcanoes, especially when they spout figures and dusty calculations, seem dull to those who have not lived in a volcanic country, they are of perennial interest to all who do. The very absence of slight shakes makes the permanent population nervous. They believe that occasional tremors relieve internal tension. In San Salvador I found some the more ready to anticipate a new disaster because of the continued quietude of the earth. They shook their heads and looked grave and went on building. That is the nature of life, human or vegetable. The marvels of new and rebuilt cities are duplicated by the marvels of resurgent forests. Cosigüina destroyed its own children in vain. The pastures, bush and forests, are renewed. After the rains the ash-brown earth is green; the trees increase in height and bulk and seedlings flourish. As I wandered among them I

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regretted that there was not with me a botanist whose pure botany was modified and controlled by a great knowledge of general biology. How great a pity it is that so many men of one science are but laymen, and ignorant laymen, in another. They often despise the work of their fellows, and if they have to use it must take it on trust for want of some knowledge of its general principles. It never came home to me so clearly as in this Nicaraguan peninsula that if to travel is to learn, it more frequently leaves us regretting our ignorance of the sciences which can make travel really fruitful. Blessed is the man of one idea in Central America : he may perhaps leave it with satisfaction. At Cosigüina I wanted a big library of reference, or, better still, a friendly company which included all those skilled in the various branches of biology, and especially a keen and eager student of plant-life. It takes such a man, who also possesses the gift of exposition, to interest everyone in the problems that trees and plants offer the observer. Few really recognise that life in all its manifestations is one, and that puzzles yet unsolved as regards the human body may find solutions in organisms that live by the green leaf and the salts of the earth. My own knowledge of botany is of the scantiest, though I may urge in extenuation that I have read Professor's Farmer's little book *Plant Life* more times than I can count. But a slight general knowledge may leave us without much help

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in the face of special and peculiar growths. Every acre, even the barrenest, of Cosigüina is full of interesting things, from the water-bearing hojachigue to giant hardwoods and a million epiphytes. The little known of them locally is economic and commercial. A caoba, a conicaste or jenisaro will make a log of such and such dimensions and is worth so much. I had had some hope that José, in addition to his recognised stores of knowledge, might possess some concerning trees and other branches of natural history, but he owned his complete ignorance. He said he thought he knew an alligator from an iguana, but when I asked him about the bird known as the road-runner he brooded over the question for a while and then told me triumphantly that it was a bird that hops about in the dark! But I have to own that José was at least interested in the bull's-horn thorn, and brought me in some finer specimens of the thorn than I had yet seen. And I found even the campistas somewhat interested in the amate.

Every native has recognised this particular tree's extraordinary character. It is known as the *matepalo*, which means tree or timber destroyer. Amate is sometimes held to mean "love thee," though that is a very childish derivation of the word, since this huge epiphyte grows on, folds over, enwraps and finally swallows up and destroys the tree which gave it its first support. It is a kind of Ficus, of which there are hundreds of species, and

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though I heard it gives a small amount of caoutchouc, as timber it is useless. Its victims are mostly small trees, though this is not always so, and I found several flourishing on big palms. I asked many questions about this tree, but got very few pertinent answers. The ignorance shown of it made me turn with the greater curiosity to this peculiar and even monstrous tree-murderer.

There seem to be several varieties of the epiphyte. They may, indeed, be species, but some things made me think that the difference seen may be due to the supporting trees. It seems to be half-way between a parasite and a mere epiphyte. A seed is apparently dropped by some bird and lodges in a crevice of bark. I infer from its general habits that the seed roots itself in the tree. But it never destroys it at an early stage. It becomes a creeper, and soon drops aerial roots which bury themselves in the ground. From the peculiar creeping habits of these roots, which extend far, I imagine that they in their turn might lay hold of a neighbouring tree and grow upon that. At first it might seem no more harmful than a wild convolvulus, or any other creeping plant or liana. But lianas do but make the tree they use a mechanical support. They do not swallow and engulf it, fold upon fold. The tree to which the amate clings is in the end as surely doomed as a week-old calf in the jaws of an alligator. And yet, most curiously, the amate seems to avoid

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as far as it can doing any direct harm to its support. Only the seed roots seem to enter the bark. It is possible that they do not, but merely germinate where they lodge. The aerial roots certainly avoid doing so, though each, when it touches its own trunk or another root or branch, enters into it and becomes part of it. This capacity of self-grafting or auto-parasitism I shall have occasion to speak of later. It is fully as remarkable as its refraining as long as possible from harming the supporting tree. I have seen a jenisaro with its leaves green and flourishing when its main trunk was for ten feet or more buried inside the enemy which it helped to lift and grow. I saw several palms still alive and strong with the growths of the amate only a few feet from their crowning leaves. It looks as if the epiphyte knew that the higher its support the greater height it would itself attain. But the end comes at last. The process may be slow, but it is certain. Presently the amate begins to wind round and swallow one by one the leaf-bearing branches, and in the end nothing is left but the amate itself. Sometimes one sees amates with long straight pipes through them. These are made by the final decay of the dead palm. In other cases I have seen an amate lifted, as it were, upon several separate standards. Once the spaces between them were, I believe, occupied by the trunk of the tree which has been killed.

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If I had been able to discover a detailed description of this tree or its congeners anything more might be superfluous. But the farther one goes into any branch of science the more one is amazed by the scanty knowledge yet attained of it. At first it seems as if everything has been described. So long as we stick to the text-books we shall still think so. But go outside them, and nothing seems done and everything is yet to do. It takes long periods to co-ordinate isolated observations, and valuable ones are frequently forgotten, re-discovered and again forgotten. So if any have described in detail the processes by which the branches and roots of the amate grow into and, as it were, melt into each other, I have not been able to find their papers. The particular matepalo characteristic of self-grafting seems to me to bear a very remarkable likeness to the physiological process known as zygosis, by which growing parts in an embryo approach, touch and finally join together. This has been described by Sir Arthur Keith as truly analogous to the healing of a wound. The actual facts preceding this melting and growing into one are, however, still matters of guess-work. The healing of a wound is what may be called a pathologico-physiological process. Yet we mostly assume, as I think quite wrongly, that embryonic processes are always physiological, for we forget that classical or text-book normality exists nowhere but in print. How

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then do pathological or wound-healing processes come into existence in zygosis? It seems to me that we have in the amate's conduct a like phenomenon to observe and argue from, which throws a light even on human physiology. Two perfectly healthy branches approach each other and are presently made one. In one case, in the very precincts of the Cosigüina hacienda, I saw a big branch with the laid-up appearance of a huge hawser. It may seem out of place here to go into an obscure phenomenon of this order, but it may certainly be suggested that what we see in the mammalian embryo and in the amate are exactly analogous phenomena, and that the plant suggests how and why the partially pathological state necessarily preceding the junction of tissues is brought about. If this is "the healing of a wound" then the wound is healed by normal processes of repair. I suggest that the bark of the amate is easily damaged: it has no great power of resistance. Every cell in a body or plant secretes and excretes. Its health is ensured by the free escape of its excretions. But as soon as the coils or branches of the amate are pressed together excretion is interfered with, there is bruising, a liquefaction of dead cells, and a state produced which frees cells inside the cortex from its influence as a limiting membrane. Repair then ensues: the inner tissues of both limbs join like cells together, and the bark is repaired where the

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cortical cells can live and excrete normally. I cannot see how it can be denied that exactly similar processes must occur *in embryo*. There must also be something, some cell-action, in the tips of the aerial roots which produces a like state whenever they touch and adhere. For they enter the parent tree and become doubly attached. It is possible that the amate evolved by growing upon trees which it could not penetrate, but could only swallow up mechanically. This swallowing process is not confined to trees or living plants. I have seen a photograph, totally misunderstood by the photographer, in which one swallowed up an old cart-wheel laid against its trunk. Another overgrew a derelict wagon. There is a very smooth, one might say suave, look about the bark of an amate. Yet this very smoothness and suavity gave me a peculiar feeling of dislike, almost of horror, however unscientific such a feeling may seem. The tree used everything it came into contact with, and only murdered life ruthlessly when it had to do it. Its apparent reluctance to kill its slave and carrier could not moderate but rather increased the feeling it gave one. Still, there are many facts in animal life, especially as I have before observed, among the Arachnidæ, or spiders, which inspire such sentiments even among experts. And some pitcher plants as they catch and digest flies and other victims are curiously unpleasant to contemplate. But nothing

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but the amate has ever made me feel it possible to believe for a romantic moment in a plant catching and consuming big living creatures. To watch it engulf some old carreta fold on fold and curve on curve, moving slowly, but with the exact inevitability of a vast anaconda, is to watch something which is not so pleasant to see as it is curious to reflect upon.

It was John Hunter who attributed a kind of consciousness to all living matter. He knew nothing of the cells of which it is composed, but he saw that bone and other tissues in growth and repair acted as if they knew what they were about. Why should they not "know"? What is knowledge, outside the abstract world of logicians, epistemologists, and metaphysicians, but ability to react to our environment with advantage? We limit knowledge most unfairly to the brain, or rather to the thousand million cells of the cortex. With them we react, often clumsily enough, to our changing environment. A mere sympathetic ganglion reacts with far more certainty, and much humbler single cells do the same as they seek and find food and achieve their work. I cannot here discuss the philosophy of the idea of "purpose," or the method by which we put an illegitimate notion of purpose into the universe; but to watch the amate may help us to see how it is that savage races and many civilised people, who do not reckon themselves unintelligent, attribute mind and thought and consciousness to growths

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without a nervous system, which after all is but a highly complex system of reflexes. And these again are but linkages of the results of stimulation on single cells. Protoplasm itself carries in it the power of adaptation, and life *is* adaptation, not the power of adaptation, just as life is action, not thought. Here in this timber-slayer is a plant which has, we may say, no right to be a tree at all. And yet in spite of everything it becomes one. It must limit its destructiveness to lift itself and grow. It must have its support to help it for many long years. During these years its victims may propagate their kind to supply other victims. It has a devilish air of thinking things out. But that is what protoplasm always does. It is the great experiment-monger : it works by trial and error, and comes out at last or perishes.

Perhaps epiphytes of such an order must have effects on the trees they use but do not kill at once. Living and moving woody tissues which can melt into, and root into, themselves must have tremendous powers. It may be that the power which palms and other trees have of surviving until swamped mechanically has been acquired by ages of reaction. Trees and plants have various means of defence, some internal, some external. I noted no epiphyte, or parasite, on the terribly armed spinous cedar. Its bark from the roots up resembles with its spines the integument of some geologic monster. It is a noble tree, and so armed against any assault that

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when riding by it I took more care than I should have done in a thicket of bull's-horn thorns with their fierce curved horns and savage allied symbiotic ants. Yet it seems as if the roots of this cedar are in some way without protection. Out on the edge of a desolate flat in the south-east part of Cosigüina I saw something of which I should have been incredulous had it been told me by any but a trustworthy naturalist. A solitary spinous cedar had been overthrown, probably by one of the hurricanes common in the rainy season, and on its upturned roots, enough of which remained in the ground to keep it alive, I saw another tree growing. I found that this parasite was actually a healthy specimen of the bull's-horn thorn, or *cornesuela*, itself, the roots of which had no connection with the earth, but were solidly attached to and growing in the upturned roots of the cedar. The thorn thus drew its water, salts and nitrogen through another tree. It may be that all plants were once parasitic, and that the potentiality of parasitism remains dormant in many. The savage and remorseless struggle for life in the teeming tropics must have led to many destroying themselves by the destruction of the very plants they needed to prey on. Parasitism may thus limit itself. Many specialised pathogenic bacteria may have disappeared in this way. If yellow fever wiped out humanity the *stegomyia fasciata* would have little chance of surviving. But

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as a rule the struggle continues, and new powers of immunity are acquired or old ones reinforced. We may take it that the *fasciata* has been modified by man and man by the *fasciata*. It is not possible to be orthodox in the face of Nature. The adequate concepts of the closet or museum disclose their weakness in the open air and the sun.

There remains one more plant to be noted, and from it can be drawn other unorthodox arguments. In the wet swamp of the little Rio Grande the *Dendrophylloides pertusum* grew in great abundance. It covered many trees with pendulous leaves bigger than a man's hand. These leaves are perforated by many irregular holes. In some there is a greater extent of "hole" than of the remaining leaf. In others there may be only one place lacking tissue or there may be three or more. They are entirely wanting in regularity or symmetry, and at first suggest that insects have produced them. But they are a regular and specific feature of this plant as well as some others known to botanists. How did they come about? Will the chromosome-mongers tell us? Is it not likely that we have here a pathological condition which led to repair and was inherited? In another place I have advanced and defended the view that disease and subsequent reaction and repair play a great part in variation and evolution; but at that time I knew nothing of this plant, which strongly supports the view suggested. No doubt

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we are apt to find what we look for, but I found in the swamps and forests of Cosigüina more plants and arguments than mercy to the general reader permits me to put down here. I must remember that during this excursus I have left a great number of harmless people who cared little or nothing for biology on the rim of the crater. I am glad to say that no one was eliminated by Natural Selection in the descent, and that I observed with pleasure the acquisition by N. of new characteristics as regards the management of mules.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MENOS LA GASOLINA

Punctuality and gasolinas. Don Mariano. We leave Cosigüina. Santa Julia. A *queseria* at close quarters. Bits and spurs. The ride to Potosi. The camp by the Gulf. A wasted day. *El patron* feeds his men. The *gasolina* at last. Landing passengers. Our embarkation. A miserable night. The Cutuco Aduana. Habit and instinct.

IT had been more or less settled in San Salvador that we were to stay at Cosigüina for a fortnight. I say "more or less" advisedly, for nothing is ever settled definitely in Central America. This gives an atmosphere to the world generally which I found very charming after the comparatively hard-and-fast European notion that punctuality which works by a time-table is a virtue. This arises from a bitter sense of duty and an over-appreciation of the value of time. But as duty and such ideas of time cannot flourish in a tropical climate any better than cherries and apples it is vain to attempt to plant them there, and the rigid in these things will only make themselves at once unhappy and unpopular. I speak as one of the converted, for it had been my boast that in a fairly long life I had only three times

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been late for an appointment. Now it began to dawn upon me that northern morality was slave morality : there was no freedom about it. There is nothing which gives us such a sense of freedom as the recognition that to keep our word, even with ourselves, is but obeisance to a geographical fetish. Still, if one lives in Europe, and has to return to it, the ridiculous moralists, without knowledge of the doctrine of mañana, who live there, expect engagements to be kept. I might not have been so anxious, but my tobacco and Honduranian cigarettes were exhausted, and I had to fall back on native puros, one hundred for a peso, to which the very worst Vevey Fin is a Cuban cigar from the Vuelta Abajo. Towards the end of the fortnight I began to suggest to Don José that we were supposed to be in Tela on the 28th March in order to catch a particular steamer. It says much for the European character of his mind, brought about by Vienna and Paris, that he did not laugh and point out that all steamers were more or less alike, and that there was very little difference indeed between the 28th March and the 28th April or May. I was now sufficiently "Centralised," to put it so, to recognise the deep truth of all this if he had brought argument to bear on the point. However, he refrained from doing it, and told me that he had written to the captains of various gasolinas plying in the Bay with a view to their taking us back to Cutuco only a week later

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than I expected. I was more or less satisfied, for it seemed possible, even probable, that the conduct of our gasolina, the *Colorado*, had been a mere accident, and that other petrol-launches owned a higher morality, better construction and captains with some faint apprehension of dates. I had still to learn that the pure relativity of time had been discovered by such navigators long before Einstein was born. From the Rio Grande, the border river of Northern Mexico, down to far Patagonia this is a cardinal fact of life.

Thus encouraged to believe that we should be able to leave Cosigüina without much delay, I had further opportunities of observation unstressed by undue anxiety. This was welcome enough, for there was nothing there which was not of interest. Any possibility of monotony or dullness was obviated by having to inspect my feet daily. The discovery of new niguas, with the consequent operation, might always be looked for. To speak quite seriously, I regard the nigua as the one feature of tropical American life which renders life there unpleasant. In the towns there are few. People may live in the cities for years without one. But everywhere in the country where roving pigs, for ever seeking food about the *finca*, make an easy breeding-ground for this detestable flea, they absolutely swarm. Pigs may possibly be necessary to humanity. Having no passion for pork, I may be a hostile witness.

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If they are they might at least be kept away from the houses by an adequate fence. But there again, how shall an adequate fence be maintained when the patron is away? José put one up about the hacienda. It stayed up while he was there and vanished slowly in his absence. Wood is useful, and a machete is as good as a hatchet. A sliver here and a sliver there leaves the fence a mere simulation of a barrier. An old boar rubs his infested hide against it and down it comes. The barbed wire lies about for a time, catches a few cows and horses, and is then cut up and used by the first man who needs it. Though one may, and indeed must, speak humorously of some Central American ways, they cannot be esteemed perfect. Take Dr. Bailey and American influence from San Salvador and the *stegomyia fasciata* will increase, and so will prayers to the saints to save those sick of yellow fever. It can thus be supposed that the nigua will be as permanent a feature of life there as San Miguel or El Viejo. The only hope for its extirpation is that it may one day be discovered as a carrier of disease. Then the scientific American doctor will attack the pig.

My hope of getting away from Cosigüina partly depended on another doctor, Don José's brother, who practised in Panama, now comparatively a health resort. Each year Don Mariano Gasteazoro came with his family and had a month's hunting

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on Cosigüina. He was expected daily at the Nicaraguan port, Corinto. He would ride from Chinandega to the ranch : the family and the baggage were to come by gasolina from the mosquito-ridden hole on the Estero Real known as Tampisco. The days passed, and Don Mariano did not appear. I began to think I should go on taking the temperature of Nicaragua with a clinical thermometer and making it 99° in the shade until I was buried there. And then José came to me with some letters. One was from the skipper of the gasolina who was coming from Tampisco. "It is absolutely settled for Friday at 9 a.m.," said José. "We shall camp at Potosi on Thursday night and you will leave in the morning." Have I not said that my kindly friend and host was largely a European? How else could he have brought himself to believe what he told me? My own incredulity was perhaps founded on the fact that much contact with men in many countries had left me anything but a good European. And the perilously exact hour of 9 a.m. made me shiver. Did I not know how easily my neighbours here received a promise of that kind and how little they resented it when it is duly and promptly broken? After all, what *does* it matter if a few more days are lost? Is there not eternity to draw on? I murmured *menos los mulos* to myself, and changing the phrase, pondered over *menos la gasolina*.

If we were somewhat delayed in getting off so

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was Don José. I had reckoned that we should all go back to San Salvador together, and with José to escort us everything would go easily. But the late arrival of his brother, with whom he had to discuss business, made this impossible. He and Doña Eva had to remain for another week and run a houseful of guests. We wondered where seven or eight more people were to be put even if we went away. We were very sorry to part with our kindly and charming hostess. She, doubtless, wished to come with us. But I promised to visit her children and tell them that their parents would be back in a few more days. Doña Eva consoled herself by doing everything for everybody and preparing the food for our camp at Potosí. We said good-bye and got away from the house at seven in the morning, the hour of departure having been fixed rigidly for 5 a.m. under threat of the patron's high displeasure. We looked back and saw Doña Eva on the verandah : it was, perhaps, our last sight of one who had been a stranger and was now a friend. Many have learnt how sad it is to do anything consciously for the last time. We had come to the end of our journey : it was all the great Pacific to our tiny Rio Grande that we should see Nicaragua no more. Now the little troubles of Cosigüina seemed nothing to us. We had been very happy there, with never a dull moment, among very kindly people. We had been but strangers and gringos, and were, it may be,

in Cosigüina included first of all a visit to Santa Julia, a queseria situated on the Gulf not far from Monypenny Point. The road was long and dusty: its only attraction till we struck the coast was the timber. The hardwoods of Central America which are actually valuable would take a whole page to enumerate. Many of them are not yet known in Europe. As we rode through the forest I could have wished my horse more generous and adequate. It is insufficient for comfort to have an animal with little but the anatomical peculiarities which enable us to recognise his species. This was the poverty-stricken case of my mount. It is also the case with a dead horse. I wished Pink Nose dead long before we came to Santa Julia, and then forgot all about him. Of all the queserias it was the best worth seeing. From under its thatched roof the distant Honduranian mountains were visible. We could see the Point stretching far out into the quiet

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shining Gulf. When we arrived a man and his wife were up to their elbows in a troughful of curds which when squeezed and dried would be cheese. Some naked little boys ran about among tied-up calves whose mothers were out grazing, and one poor calf died of dysentery while we were there. From the house timbers hung several hammocks : in one of them a naked baby boy slept peacefully. The heat was so intense that perhaps only the pigs and hens enjoyed it. In very great heat, such as  $100^{\circ}$  in the shade, hens breathe and pant with open beaks, but when it is less than  $100^{\circ}$  they seem to like it.

We had lunch in the shade of the house, and then baby was dispossessed of his hammock to make room for the patron. In Central America the child has a hammock for a cradle and spends much of his life in it. And he often dies in it when he is old. It is more necessary to the peon than tobacco. What Sir Walter Raleigh called "a Brazil bedde" is part of his life and greatly conditions it. But wherever it is greatly used there seems to be lack of energy. I cannot imagine the Australian bush worker using up four hours of the day in one, unless, indeed, he is a "boundary-rider" or stockman, the Austral equivalent of cow-boy or campisto, with no more than a few hours' work a day. In New South Wales my own work, which was mostly riding forty miles in the morning, left me long hours

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to spend in a hot tent with nothing to do but curse the flies and read some old book for the tenth time. I was always happier with a full day, even if it ran from dawn to midnight, as it often did in the busy season. But usually there is nothing so easy for most of us to acquire as laziness, and the hammock disease is catching. After all, why should we work so hard? The answer here is a somnolent "Quien sabe?" It is the natural reply of natural laziness, a desirable state hard to be reached by insane and unnatural white people who live in a mad Europe.

After bathing in the Gulf, where I thought it best to keep one eye lifting in case of sharks, N. and I imitated the patron and also took to the hammocks. Porque no? So the horses stood and stamped and switched their long tails till the sun began to decline. This rest made them even lazier than before, though the first part of the road to Potosi was also the road to their home. Where no one knows or cares the very animals take on the colour of humanity. As soon as ours found that they were not going direct to the estancia they sulked. If any gringo meant to take them to the primitive port he must "work his passage" with a fierce curb bit and savage spur. They, too, had the hammock habit. In these countries no one rides on a snaffle. The wildest or the meekest horse takes alike the same instrument of torture. A collection of Mexican and Central American

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bits and spurs would make a humanitarian quail and most English horsemen very angry, though their own too frequent use of a simple curb is, or should be, unnecessary. Those who cannot control a horse with a snaffle should get the animal properly broken or learn what every Australian horseman knows almost by nature. However, our horses did not need control, and though I hate spurs, I had to use them. N.'s Gammonal was as slow as mine, or even worse. On the way to Potosi Don José and Anselmo left us for a time and told a young campisto to guide us. But mostly he rode last, with the result that Gammonal every now and again showed great liveliness. N.'s theory was that the *mozo* came up behind and touched up her mount with a knife. Nothing else could have made him adopt any pace but that suitable for a funeral.

It was such difficulties that prevented our last long ride in Nicaragua from being melancholy. We knew it was the last time we should follow a forest path in that strangely fascinating wilderness. Few other places that I know, and I know many, combine the attractions of forest, plain and mountain, of utter barrenness and great fertility, while on the one side shine the silken waters of the Gulf and on the other the Pacific Ocean holds out hints of far-off countries and tells tales of great and ancient adventure. The people, too, were so simple and kindly that life itself for an old wanderer grew simple

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once more as the stress and strain of Europe, where no man rests or may rest, became things of memory. And then, again, the pleasure my young companion took in things, even in trials which I had fancied, and even feared, would test her too highly, added to the natural pleasures I found once more in such a country as Nicaragua. Too many subdued to London resent such a life. They cannot return to simplicity ; they lament the absence of the fleshpots of Egypt. But in a few there remain the instinct and passion of a more ancient past, and such find greater joy in a wilderness than in Rome or Athens.

The final sunset in the forest was of a surpassing beauty. As the sun went down we were to the eastward of Cosigüina Volcan, and a vast flower of rose and vermillion grew upon its northern shoulder and then faded and died in reds and purples as the stars sprang out in a deep blue sky. Then once more the forest thickened and darkness was doubled by the shadows as we came to a narrower and less used trail, which led across a warm volcanic alligator-haunted stream that runs into the Rio Dulce. Here our youthful campisto guide led us astray, for the path was invisible in the night and much obscured and hampered by fallen timber. Just as I began to wonder if we were not destined to pass the hours till dawn under the shelter of some gigantic conicaste the boy found he was wrong and retraced his steps. Then suddenly I heard distant voices and saw a

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far-off glimmering light. The scrub opened into starlight, and we were on Potosi beach. José was there before us with Anselmo. Half a dozen or more campistas lounged or sat on the farther verandah. The rude, palm-thatched house was locked. We were to camp outside.

Lamps had been brought from the ranch and stood smoking on the rough table. So we sat down and took our supper and hot coffee from a thermos flask, which was our one reminder of a half-forgotten civilisation. It was curious to note that Anselmo, practically though not then titularly the manager of the ranch, waited on Don José at table. It was obviously an honour to do so, and as Pepys would have said, it was "pretty to observe." We ate and talked and discussed the hopeful prospects of seeing our gasolina in the morning, and were eaten alive in the meanwhile by sand-flies, which here troubled us long after sundown. They are not like mosquitoes, who hate the sun and are most active in the dark.

After supper we slung our hammocks and talked awhile and smoked in comparative peace. But we were presently disturbed by half a dozen horses, each carrying double, a man and a woman. They had come to meet friends who should arrive from Tampisco in the morning, and palavered eternally over the question of where to camp and whether the gasolina would come. They had evidently banked on occupying our quarters, and only went

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for ruder shelter very reluctantly. By now one might have slept anywhere, even on the shore, for it was dry and windless and the mosquitoes were few. Before turning into my hammock I wandered down to the beach, fringed with a faint line of foam, and said my farewell to Nicaragua. My regrets were tinged darkly with the thought that I had not seen all I might have seen and done all I could have done. Why had I not made more notes? Then a ghost appeared in the starlight. It turned out to be N., who was also bidding farewell to the country and also lamenting that she had not every day and all day lived up to her opportunities. I consoled her and myself with the reflection that this was the sad fate of every good traveller. For when notes and diaries become an obsession and a fetish they are the very front and offending of those who worship them. On my shelves in England I had a book called *The Art of Travel*. There should be one on the art of writing travel. I might learn much from it, but at least had not to learn that undigested diaries have destroyed the value of many men's work. After all, any form of art is a matter of selection, and that which is remembered with pleasure, anger, or humour has the best chance of fulfilling the unwritten canons which govern all art, even the humblest. I left N. mournful and unconvinced.

We went back to the camp. N.'s "private room" was but the darkest part of the dark verandah.

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I left her struggling with the darkness and the difficulties of a first sleep in a hammock, emphasised in her case by stretched and irregular knittles which made it unstable and threatened to turn her out every time she moved. Some of the campistas had gone back to the estancia, but some still remained and camped round about us. The few mosquitoes were loud-voiced and insistent, but the very noise showed that they were harmless, for the malaria-carrying *anopheles* is comparatively voiceless. I went to sleep in my own hammock, a rather striking production of some Argentine artist in netting which was much admired by everyone at Cosigüina, as soon as I had worked myself into the belief that the promised and thrice-promised gasolina would actually come at nine in the morning. There are times when the naturally sceptical fall into credulity as easily as any enthusiast. Had I not seen men of science seize a new faith without proof or credentials? My rare fit of faith at least helped me to sleep if it achieved nothing so marvellous as I hoped. Perhaps the faith of the credulous is a like opiate.

We rose at dawn, bathed and took coffee. By breakfast-time the sun was splendid and roasted us as we ate and talked. An hour or so later Dr. Mariano Gasteazoro rode in from the ranch. He had ridden sixty-two miles from Chinandega, and came to meet his family who were to reach Potosí by our boat. He was anxious for them to arrive

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from Tampisco, where they were waiting in a pestilential mosquito-haunted swamp. Long before eight o'clock we had our baggage packed and my own hammock rolled up, and walked about the beach and the timber-strewn shore looking eastwards towards the Estero Real and El Viejo for the gasolina. At nine o'clock it came punctually, but from the westward, round Monypenny Point. It was on its way to, not from, Tampisco! The skipper of the accursed *El Trionfo*, for this was the craft that had distinguished itself when it towed us after our breakdown, steered close in shore and bellowed that he would return at nine in the evening. Perhaps he would and perhaps he would not. If the boat did not get to Tampisco just before *pleamar*, or high-water, and leave with the first of the ebb, we should be stuck at Potosi for another night. For the least delay at Tampisco meant losing the tide and another twelve hours. He did not explain why he had not kept time and his word. Maybe it was love or alcohol or merely an instinctive desire to keep faith with native traditions. Where punctuality is a foreign vice procrastination becomes a homely virtue. We cursed him in chorus and prepared to waste the day in the wilderness. No entomologist would have wasted it. There were "bugs" in plenty. N. discovered and I captured a fine specimen of the mygale known as the horse-spider, which is, as I said elsewhere, falsely accused of

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being the cause of coronet disease. Part of the time I tried to fish in the Rio Dulce. A delightful old fisherman caught me some bait with a casting net, with which they are very skilful. Sand-flies and mosquitoes in millions drove me away, for the bank of the river was shaded by trees. I returned to the huts to intone a commination service on Central American gasolina skippers. I hoped it was the last one we should see or have anything to do with. The sequel will show how vain my hopes were, and will even prove that the detestable *Trionfo* was better far than another to which we were destined. But did 9 p.m. mean 9 a.m. on the following day? Don Mariano was inclined to think so. Or did it mean anything at all?

When Don José saw the position he sent off to Cosigüina for more provisions. Soon campisto after campisto came in with sacks of food and more coffee. Doña Eva did her best for us, as she always did. And now more campistas came and other peons, and two or three fishermen hung about till the camp was full and lively. When it was noon we saw a little more of the customs of the country. For now Don José had to feed his flock. There was something charming, childlike and yet patriarchal in the scene, for none of the men had brought food for themselves. That was the task and duty and pleasure of the patron, whom they saw so seldom, perhaps no more than twice a year.

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José made up portions for them with his own hands and called each one by his name. They took what was given with obvious pleasure and perhaps a little shyness. For is it not a great thing to be *el patron* of a hereditary ranch, and also a wise magician of a doctor in far-off wonderful Salvador, which is so full of earthquakes and all the marvels and dangers of a city? And, maybe, it added just a little to their pleasure to know that the Señor Inglese and *la niña* had come from Inglaterra and knew Londres, which was much, much farther away even than San Salvador.

Sleep in the hammock killed part of the weary hot day. Then we walked in the woods and wondered if we had to spend another night at Potosí. Supper-time came, and now the food was somewhat scanty. The numbers fed at noon had scarcely been reckoned up and provided for. Darkness came down heralded by swarms of sand-flies which kept up the attack for some hours. The irritation they cause is long-lasting and far-spreading. We wandered out upon the beach, now as dark as a wolf's throat, and looked for some eastward light. Lanterns were made ready to signal to the gasolina. Anselmo got from Don Mariano an electric torch which he strapped across his forehead. He stood on the rude little pier with half a dozen others. Nine o'clock came and passed. What about the tide at Tampisco? And then just

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about ten there was a shout from the jetty. The light had been seen. This was a triumph for the captain of *El Trionfo*. Or was it an outrage on native custom? Or perhaps after all a delusion of our own look-out man? For a long time the light was not seen again. Yes, but look! There it is, plain to see! The camp buzzed with excitement, and men and carretas hurried to the beach, where the oxen sank almost knee-deep in mud. We were up to our ankles. As dimly-seen peons brought our things down I counted bags in the dark as they sank in mud. Then I found N. and José and his brother, also deep in mud and barely to be distinguished in the thick darkness. Had Don Mariano's wife and children got away from Tampisco? And would anyone be drowned getting ashore? The land or night breeze rose steadily, the little breakers on the shoaling water showed white in the gleam of lanterns and the stars. Was the ebb so far advanced that none could reach land over the sand-flats? And every moment the breeze freshened. Don Mariano's anxiety was so painful to witness that I forgot my own anxiety to be on the road to Europe. Then at last the gasolina came to an anchor. We saw her light no more. But two peons went out to seek her in the old dug-out, and after a long wait we heard shouts, and presently in the massed lantern light saw the little boat coming back. We even heard the excited cries of the

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children, who a minute later were brought ashore in the arms of wading peons and fishermen. With them was the nurse. The next journey brought the wife herself. In the thick darkness we made the acquaintance of the Señora and her children, and then the cry was raised for us to go before it was too late to cross the mud and sand-flats. "Hurry, or you cannot get away!" was the word. We shook hands hastily, too hastily it seemed, after having had so good a time. José said to me : "I hope you don't regret having come." He will know now, even better than he did, how little we regretted it. Two peons came up to us, and N. was carried out to the boat in an arm-chair grip. She waved her hand, called out "Adios," and sank into the darkness. Then I too, for the first time in my life, was carried away in like fashion. I found N. in the bottom of the wet and plunging dug-out. I was dumped in hastily and our baggage was dumped on top of us. Then the shouting crew tried for minutes to get the piragua off the sands. Just as I was about to jump overboard to help they got her free and shoved off. We bumped a dozen times, but at last drew into deeper water, and in three minutes came to the gasolina. We clambered on board and found yet a dozen passengers, some of them women, lying sick on the bottom boards as the *Trionfo* plunged at her anchor. It took many minutes to put Don Mariano's baggage ashore, and just as we

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got away we saw the lights of José's big party move off along the beach. They and we shouted again and again, "Adios, adios," and we were off at last for La Union.

These are little adventures ; it may be they are but discomforts. Yet it is easier to display courage when tried by inevitable disaster than to summon up patience to face the carelessness and incompetence of fools. I suppose the only way to look at the conduct of the Central American gasolina is to regard it as a national tragedy, as well as a comedy and a farce. We had a wretched enough night, and I cast the skipper of *El Trionfo* for the part of chief villain. He was a big, surly devil, fat, muscular, clad in trousers and dirty singlet, and an apparent dislike of all gringos. He grunted gloomily when I gave him a message and letter from Don José, and looked as if he was inclined to throw me and the letter overboard. I was glad when he went for'ard to steer. In these boats the wheel is right in the bows. N. and I camped amidships in close company with the engines and the engineer. He at least was a decent fellow, not like the silent murderer of the *Colorado*, and smilingly rescued a "hair-slide" of N.'s from a pit of dirty water. The after-part of the launch was so full of miserable folk from Tampisco, who bore their woes with a stoical and almost Indian fortitude, that there was no room there. In our hot part at least no one was

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sick, and there was a narrow wooden seat about nine inches wide on which to rest. N. and I took this in turns, and rose up stiff and bruised and far more tired than when we lay down. Aft of us the women and babies groaned at intervals, and the heat of the near engine, which miraculously functioned with regularity, was as sickening as the smell of mixed petrol and bilge water. Even a cup of barbarous coffee extract might have mitigated our discomfort, but the twelve hours' delay at Potosi had consumed what we might have brought with us. And now the wind fell light, and the air, inside some totally unnecessary screens, was vile and poisonous. Yet all things pass. Even Damien said on the wheel: "This day must pass." By the time I began to think that death was preferable to prolonged discomfort the dawn was on us, and at four o'clock we anchored off the pier at La Union. No doubt the scene was beautiful. I would have swapped all the beauty between Hudson's Bay and the Straits of Magellan for a bath.

We were not at once allowed to go ashore. The revolution in Honduras tightened up the regulations, and the port authorities and Customs' officers were still in bed. We sat and stewed and fumed till six, and were then subjected to the unmerciful Customs of Salvador. My Spanish is of the weakest even at noon. Early in the morning it scarcely exists. Yet I was interrogated to the point of madness.

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Who was I? What was I? Where did I come from? Where was I going? Two or three held conversations about me. Ah, perhaps I was some kind of official! If so, what kind of an official? I disclaimed the notion and repeated that I was a tired and worn-out journalist, traveller, writer, and that I was a personal friend of Don José del Carmen Gasteazoro of Cosigüina and San Salvador. But although José is known from one end of Salvador to the other, I had somehow lighted upon a Customs official who did not seem to have heard of him. At last someone else enlightened my chief interrogator, and he let me go just as I was on the point of telegraphing to Dr. Quinones, the President, for assistance. I could see he was still full of doubts, but he cheered up a little when I paid four dollars (oro) for the privilege of touching the soil of Salvador. We went out staggering, and with two boys to carry our baggage got to the station in time to miss the Salvador train. This was more of a blessing than a disaster, for we went back to Cutuco, where Mr. Clegg, the local railroad manager, sent us again to Mr. Mullin's apartment. In my time I had had trouble with railroad bosses, but for Mr. Mullins and Mr. Clegg I have nothing but blessings. They recognised me as an old railroad man, though of a humble kind, and the brotherhood between all sons of the rail is not yet wholly dead. A clean house, a cold bath, a good bed, and meals served by a competent

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Chinaman were no mean gifts after a dirty, hungry, thirsty night aboard *El Trionfo*. That I had to slay three splendid and very swift cockroaches merely accentuated Paradise.

It is interesting to observe how devastating a short period of discomfort is to those who have become accustomed to its opposite, and yet in what a short time, if they are reasonably healthy, they cease to revolt, and take gross dirt, or even vermin, with calm. In days now long past I suffered more from deprivation of food during thirty hours, following a time of regular plenty, than from three or four days' entire starvation succeeding a period of moderate scarcity. A single night in a wet camp seems a grave disaster, while after a few weeks with never a dry stitch on one to have one's clothes like a wet pack matters little. The first time that I observed vermin at first hand in a railroad camp the discovery almost made me sick. Three weeks later I boiled my clothes in a kerosine can every Sunday with the calm of a war-time campaigning laundryman. Revolt against hard conditions is, after all, merely the outcry of a habit: the ancient instincts of man soon restore his peace of mind.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ACROSS A GUATEMALAN WILDERNESS

Cutuco. A silent angel. Back to Salvador. The American minister. Santa Ana. The Florida. Inocente. On the road to Guatemala City. Roads and cars and *carretas*. The dust and the dawn. A half-desert. Packmen and *porrons*. The voice of the upland.

HAVING once reached Cutuco, the rest of the way back to Tela seemed comparatively easy and hurry contra-indicated. Twenty-four hours in Cutuco with none but a capable, silent, and sombre Chinaman to break the pleasant monotony meant a real rest-cure after the full days in José's Nicaraguan Pensinula. What ages it was since he and I had forgathered by the ice-runs of St. Moritz and looked at evening on the rosy peaks above Pontresina ! I was glad to know that the kindly angel of St. Moritz, as I had chaffingly yet with gratitude named him, had become no less kindly after so long a passage of time and silence. And here by the Gulf I heard of one who might have been called "the silent angel of Cutuco." He had been the local railroad manager, a quiet, reserved, capable American, who did his work and said very little. It was known that the poorer people, the peons, and jornaleros and their

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wives and children, liked him well. But by some magic of personality he, who was himself silent, imposed silence upon others, for none sang his praises loudly. Yet when at last the time came when he had to leave them for other work all Cutuco and La Union burst out into lamentations. The spell he had laid upon their tongues was lifted : they cried aloud their grief at his going. For during long years he had very quietly helped any who needed help : he had been as it were a human priest of consolation and an almoner who gave much more than mere alms to the unhappy, the needy, and the helpless. They bade him farewell in following crowds, and his nearest friends were greatly astonished. For widows and children kissed his hands and wept.

Why should I speak of him I knew not ? I have even forgotten his name. But such a man may give pause to the cynic for a little while, though their very rarity makes him return to his bitterness. For cynicism is often the concealed pity of a hopeless idealist and its savage humour an antagonist to tears.

The journey back to San Salvador calls for no great comment. It was hot and dusty to San Miguel, and hotter and dustier as we crawled and climbed round San Vicente. Our thirst was mitigated by a magnificent pine-apple, bought at the station nearest to Jiquilisco, an old but little used port. Jiquilisco

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pines are celebrated in Central America and deserve their glory. Ours was large, very yellow, and so juicy that I had to hold it out of the window while I cut it. We even put our heads out when we ate it. This is the only pine I ever came across without, or practically without, a core. As a rule tropical fruits are disappointing. But pines and bananas are greater in their native country than when imported into England. Oranges bear transport best, but such a fruit as the green-skinned orange of Samoa is a more magnificent fruit than we ever taste in England. Mangoes are on the whole a disappointment wherever found. No one, it may be noted, has ever tasted the flavour of vanilla except in pods fresh from the tree. Mexican vanilla is said to be the best, but the Salvador product equals it.

We came away from Cutuco without water and only a small quantity of coffee, and were therefore glad of fruit. The water supply for passengers was against the lavatory and of suspicious quality and origin. Any desire for it was modified by a native woman going to the tap at intervals, washing out her mouth and spitting the fluid on the floor, where it combined with heaps of dust to make a mud patch. If this recurring action provoked disgust the conduct of the conductor when he wanted a ticket from those who were eating a greasy dinner to some extent made up for it. To see a stalwart Salvadoranian armed with a "gun" and a knife

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stand up with a quarter of a fowl in one hand and a leaf full of oily rice in the other while the train-hand, at his request, searched his pockets for the ticket was comic relief. Take them all round, I have rarely seen more good-humoured people than the Salvadoranians. They can be pleasant without tips. It is much to say. Still, it is as well to have small change and to give something to everybody who looks as if he could do with it. We had a saying at sea, "Six-pennorth of ease is worth a shilling." A peso well spent on a long journey may save the irritable from apoplexy and be worth a pocketful of dollars. Even a mere real, of which eight go to the peso, may produce cordiality as pleasant as a fresco, or cool drink, in over-powering heat. It is true that money cannot overcome the great doctrine of mañana, but it can mitigate its worst results.

Having been drowned in the Gulf by a newspaper, we had many to see and many questions to answer, and therefore a few days were necessarily spent in the Earthquake City. I had not wholly given up hopes of going to Copan to visit the Maya monuments, and of riding right across Honduras to Tela. But the revolution was not over : "Reds" and "Blues" were still at each other's throats, and if the battles were as bloody as the reports the slaughter was great. San Salvador was full of refugees : I saw many in the Hotel Nuevo Mundo. So was Guatemala. It is safer to travel when there is actual

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war, so long as the area of operations is avoided, than to do so when the war is over, and the woods are full of the defeated and dispossessed. I might have chanced ten days on mules by myself, but could not risk it where another was concerned. We therefore determined to return by way of Guatemala, this time across country.

During this last stay in Salvador we had luncheon with the American minister and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Schuyler. The Minister is to be recognised, even at "forty rods," as a highly typical American of the best type, but I was curiously surprised and interested to find Mrs. Schuyler, though American for generations, purely English. She might have been the *châtelaine* of some old English castle with ancient gardens and still more ancient traditions. This perpetuation of race characteristics in the roar and swirl of American life, which in most cases modifies manner, thought, and aspect, with such peculiar rapidity that American children are usually recognisable on mere inspection (I refrain from saying anything of their manners), was pleasing and remarkable. It may be noted that English speech also survives in a few American families, and but for a somewhat harsher use of the letter R than commends itself to the educated in this country, it cannot be distinguished from the purest. I shall say nothing of my talk with Mr. Schuyler : it was interesting, but not for publication. It is a misfortune

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that all the most interesting conversations cannot be reported, save by those who write reminiscences and achieve notoriety at the expense of others, to say nothing of themselves. The discretion of a diplomatist may, however, be modified if he trusts his company. And it should be part of his endowment to know when he can do so. If to say this is to claim discretion for myself I cannot help it. The man who writes for newspapers and suppresses what he would like to impart, and what editors yearn for, may be allowed some compensation for his self-denial.

After three days in the city we left for Santa Ana by the train which goes daily at 1.0 p.m. I mention this because everyone but the head nurse at the *Casa de Salud* told us that it went at 1.30 p.m. This practical unanimity aroused my suspicions. It had left at 1.30 long ago, and many sturdy conservatives refused to believe that changes had taken place in the time-table. There is something fine about the conservatism which not only disapproves of change but also refuses to believe that change has occurred. Of such a type was the lawyer who told his client that he could not be put in prison when the man was there already. There are not a few of this order to be found in Westminster. Had it not been for my friend Levy I should have set out for Santa Ana with more false information. But a business man is an oasis in the Central

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American desert. He arranged things for me over the telephone and only omitted to tell the Hotel Florida that I required two rooms. People use the telephone a great deal in these republics. It enables them to make many more agreements, and fail to carry them out, than could otherwise be arranged.

The train left the station punctually. The Santa Ana and Acajutla line is run by an English company. Had it been managed by Central Americans I dare say it would have left at the hour conservatives preferred. There are places from which a messenger is sent to some town a mile away to say that the train has arrived. On hearing this the intending passengers get out of bed and begin to pack. If this is a libel I apologise, but at out-of-the-way places I have seen train hands holding animated conversations on politics and the like which delayed us for half an hour. To be fair, I must admit that I have seen odder things in Wales. Many years ago I was in a train which pulled up by a field covered with mushrooms. The guard, engine-driver, and fireman alighted and so did all the passengers. In a few minutes there was not a mushroom in the field, and we resumed our journey.

The heat was overpowering, and I suggested to N. that starting in the middle of the day must have been arranged by railroad directors in London. The native mind may hate work of all kinds, but it has

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at least the sense to get the absolute minimum done before noon. But we reached Santa Ana at the scheduled time. So much must be said for the management. Santa Ana is the greatest trading centre in Salvador. It does not look like it. The evening was closing in when we reached the hotel, and on our way there the sad-looking streets were almost deserted. It seemed as empty of inhabitants as if it were about to undergo the fate of Antigua. The long streets of one-storied houses looked very melancholy in the light of the afterglow. Bruges, with its grass-grown ways, seemed lively to it. Even Pompeii might be regarded as populous after parts of Santa Ana in the evening. But all the earthquake cities take on the look of something dug out of ashes and restored to partial and pathetic life, and the lava fields of active Isalco are not far from the city. They are as black and forbidding as the fatal flow of San Miguel.

The Hotel Florida is not a palace, but it is at least clean. If appalling memories of the Norte at Barrios oppressed us on entering it they were soon dispelled. But owing to Levy's omission to telephone that I had my step-daughter with me there was only one room for us. It took me much trouble to convince the hotel "clerk," who wholly lacked English, that we must have two rooms. Only one had been asked for. No other was vacant. He almost tore his hair in agitation, but at last

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surrendered his own room to me, and was so trustful that he left his gold watch in my care. After all, what use is a watch in Central America? His hung on a nail and was not even wound up. This suggested that getting away early in the morning was much less likely than an earthquake. But miracles do occur. The young Salvadoran who met us at the station was to drive us across Guatemala. He spoke English passably though he had never been out of Central America, and in mixed Spanish and English it was arranged that we were to start at four. Naturally enough I thought this meant seven or eight. Our chauffeur gave imperative orders to the "boots" to call us and bring coffee at half-past three. The more urgent he grew the more cynical and incredulous I became. But the smaller surprises of travel never cease. Our man had a real sense of time. I give his name in the hope that it may be known to posterity. It was Inocente Anaya Garcia.

Before dinner I called on a Mr McEntee, a friend of Levy's, and got him to come to dinner. It is a common thing in books of travel to describe what the traveller ate. We did not eat at the Florida. There is a Texan story of the Colonel who dined with the Judge, and when asked what they ate he replied with dignity: "Sir, we did not eat, we drank." The only way to dine at the Florida was to imitate this epicure. Still, things were clean,

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and no one spat on the floor. One has to be thankful for such mercies. McEntee wanted us to stay over a day and drive with him to Coatapeque, the big crater-lake. Very reluctantly I refused and afterwards regretted it. The time saved we had to waste in Guatemala. But McEntee was a cheerful companion, and being used to Santa Ana did not complain, or even look sad, over an incomplete and totally inadequate dinner. We went to bed early. It was idle to wander about dull, blue-painted streets, and a few minutes in the Plaza, which was only less dull because it was gaudy and raw, sufficed us. And, after all, it was possible we might be called early. I own that Inocente impressed me. He had as much energy as would furnish out an average Central American battalion.

If the main art of travel consists of taking it easy when most people would die of fury, this can be learnt by experience. If it is not learnt the traveller will perish in the flower of his youth. But the traveller is also expected to describe what he sees, and description grows more and more difficult with experience. Some young reporters will tackle jobs gaily of which a Kinglake or a Warburton would fight shy. To put down just what one remembers seems so inadequate, for observation outpaces memory. Yet in the end that is what we all come to, unless we fake the story and steal from others. I cannot and shall not attempt to describe in detail some

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hundreds of kilometres across Guatemala. Of a wonderful journey impression is piled on impression. Gorge and plain and mountain, tree-flowers, fertility and barrenness make up a strange and complex picture. So for a moment, at least, I fall back on the miraculous Inocente Anaya Garcia, who left us at 9 p.m. with his last orders, for he spoke with much firmness that we were to be ready at 4 a.m. If I said that we were, as a matter of course, roused at 3.30 by the bearer of coffee no one in Salvador would believe me. We were left severely alone till four, at which hour Inocente banged heavily on my door and told me the time. This remarkable young man had learnt English from books. His linguistic attainments had, perhaps, reinforced his native Spanish. I gathered enough of his conversation in the corridor with the "boots" and the rest of the hotel staff to believe so. But the storm calmed down and our baggage was lashed to the car in the dark. We got away at five, at least an hour before dawn.

Much might be said about roads in these republics. Most travellers say much more than can be printed save in a realistic novel, the chief claim of which is that it is unfit for publication. Were it not for a few real roads it might be said that Central America can boast of nothing but tracks little better than a cattle trail. There is, however, a real road in Honduras which runs from San Lorenzo to

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Tegucigalpa. The other we knew, for it joins San Salvador and La Libertad. All the rest are pot-holes and switchbacks strung together by rocks or dust a foot thick. Dr. Quinones, the able "Tyrannos" of San Salvador, has done much in the single year of his Presidency to justify his position. He has even got through a scheme for paving San Salvador. All the money set aside for this has not been stolen, although the story of the A, B, and C Bonds of San Salvador would appeal to a comic writer if he could but get at the truth. I suggest that a drive in the dark from Santa Ana to his frontier would fill Dr. Quinones with a desire to reform the country roads, if it did not send him to some *Casa de Salud* for massage. Naturally the great difficulty is to keep the money earmarked for such a job out of the pockets of politicians.

In spite of the road and a bucking car the long hour before the dawn was wonderful as well as exciting. It seemed as if Santa Ana could not be as dead as it looked in the evening. The road was full of bullock carretas going to the city with country produce. Most were high-wheeled, roofed-in carts, and each carried a swinging lamp just above the driver's head. As they loomed up in the shadows and the clouds of thick dust we heard the cries of the boys who here go ahead of their oxen, and when a chorus was raised by three or four, who were almost invisible, although our head-lamps threw a powerful shaft

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of light through the gloom, it seemed impossible to escape an accident or to pass them. Yet the courtesy of the native drivers, even to a car carrying gringos, was unfailing. Evil may be spoken of these people by those who know little of humanity, or have rigid notions of it, but for their general kindness and goodwill too much cannot be said. They smile when most Europeans would swear, and look amiable where they would be sulky. Stubborn oxen, a vile road, and choking dust seem nothing to them. They returned our salutes pleasantly. I own, however, that this view of the poorer classes is not taken by everyone. A great proprietor once said to me when speaking of his peons, "Ni sienten agrairo ni agradecen beneficio"—they feel no insult and are pleased by no help. But I must speak of them as I found them, and those who owed me nothing gave me more than civility.

And then at last the lights looked dimmer and another light came in the gloom, and we knew it was the dawn. Now it was not a dawn with tropical suddenness, for at this season the country people and owners of fincas, or farms, burn off the dead grass and scrub to clear their pastures for the oncoming rains. To the smoke of these wandering fires was added a morning mist in the mountains, for now we were among them, and the road if anything was worse. As we plunged through it every jar threatened the back-axle and our bones. And

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presently we came to the frontier. Here Guatemala showed its lordly indifference to travellers by having no Aduana to examine baggage and drive people to frenzy. Those who travel the other way and enter Salvador have a very different experience, one which causes great bitterness between the two States, which have never been really friendly. Soon we saw the distant waters of Lake Guija, and came at last to Mita with its ruined church in a ramshackle plaza. There we tried to eat a meal, at an exorbitant price, which for badness I have only seen excelled in South Africa. Yet what did it matter? The road at least seemed possible, the air was clean and kindly, and the way to Guatemala City lay before us. We paid the bill, said "Adios," or rather "'os," the common contraction for "Adios," and drove off with the eyes of the village upon us. We belonged to the class of mad foreigners, and were doubtless of untold wealth, and therefore not content to travel on mules or in bullock carretas after the ancient and proper manner.

The day resolves itself with difficulty into a coherent panorama. Three times our car jibbed a little and Inocente and his helper worked hard at it, twice in utter solitude and once when surrounded by interested peons, their women-folk and children, some clad in mere breech-clouts and some as naked as when they were born. Then on again and still we climbed, while palm-thatched cottages,

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nearly always surrounded by cactus hedges, succeeded each other, ever and ever at greater intervals. We drove through thick bush and open forest, sometimes on the perilous edge of deep barrancos or through dry arroyos, the bed in the rainy season of rushing streams. The bird population was very scanty on the highest uplands. Yet all who might kill or snare them were also few. Salvador is thick with humanity. In Guatemala's spaces there are few men and few grazing cattle. A great sign of this was the rarity of the black buzzards. Hardly one sopilote could be seen sailing in the sky on the watch for a dead or dying calf. The magic of the country lay in its wilderness, its very emptiness. The uplands grew even more barren, the road for long miles was as white as glaring chalk. The world was all one vast view, and in the pellucid atmosphere we saw far ranges and here and there an obvious but silent "volcan." At the end of one deep valley rose the shadowy bulk of a mighty cone. Inocente said it was called *El Pino*. I know no volcan of the name. Surely it was the far ghost of Agua, hard by Antigua. Central Americans know little of their own country. There are more maps of it in one drawer at the Royal Geographical Society than Guatemala City can show. But what are maps to a Guatemalteco? Is not Guatemala the centre of the world? That is true, señor!

In the city I traced our route on such maps

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as I could find. For how could memory serve me? We passed Coatapeque, Atescatempo, Mita, Achulpa. Then came Azacualpa, Quijiniquilapa, Barbarena, Cerro Redonde, and Los Verdes. The more ancient names, redolent of Maya, Aztec and Toltec, are the more enchanting. How many beautiful Indian names are buried and forgotten in North America under more barbaric and cacophonous hybrids! Let Main Street tell us proudly. Some of these places I recall vividly, some are hidden as it were by dust. Most especially can I recall one lake of earlier morning, a lake even more lonely than Salvador's Ilopango, for in the golden light streaming over the hills were three naked brown fishermen, standing motionless in their dug-outs like bronze statues, while they waited with casting nets for their prey.

We left our higher upland wilderness by a long steep road that shone, a white and narrowing ribbon, for miles ahead of us. Then we climbed again, and the roads grew worse once more. Fatigue overwhelmed me. It came in a sudden flood, as the desire for sleep comes at times. I tried to sleep, and, sleeping, was wakened every minute. It is possible to love the glory of motion even as De Quincey loved it, even to rejoice at the hardships of travel, but after all a man grows old. I began to regret that Guatemala was on any map, and to remember the gloomy prognostications of some

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friends of mine who seemed to agree with the people in Congreve's play who could not imagine a man being fit to go abroad after he reached the great age of forty. What woke me up was a remark of Inocente. He said that he should probably return to Santa Ana that very night. The thought of doing this again was too much. I argued with him on the point. But his insistence was a tonic. I might be three times his age, and certainly I was not less, but if he could stand the double journey I should at least be able to endure the single one. I smoked black Honduranian cigarettes and forbore to think of ease or rest. It is good to be shaken out of the ruts of life that are apt to grow so deep in London. After all, was London so much preferable to Quijiniquilapa? And then a great tree flowering in scarlet or violet, or gold and white, or some far distance of blue peaks, brought me to the right frame of mind. Perhaps, too, some strangeness of weary toil, as of a half-Indian packman nearly bowed to his native dust by heavy *porrons* or water-pots, made me remember how little I endured compared with these sons of the soil.

Have I described anything of Guatemala and its wilderness? I fear not. I might almost as well speak of secret Peten, hidden behind British Honduras, which I have never visited, where it is said that cannibals dwell and awful things happen. To know a country and its people we must live in it and with





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them. Yet to have lived and worked with men of perhaps fifty nations is a great help to general understanding. In the old days I had sheared sheep by the side of Mexicans and Indians, and knew what toil and hardship meant, even hunger and thirst and the wild desires of an exile. So it may be that I felt more of the nature of these poor people than many with greater opportunities. And even if I am mistaken I do not regret that wild rush across a great part of the wilderness of Guatemala, for all its dust and dirt dies down, its weariness is forgotten, and the beauty of strangeness, even of sadness, remains. To behold these simple folk, who ask only to be left alone to draw their nourishment from their native soil, might make any wonder at the mad and busy world to which I was returning. We may marvel not so much at their division from it as at our own adherence to its complex inanities, desires and ambitions. Are we right? Perhaps the open uplands and mountains of Guatemala do not think so.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BACK TO TELA

Missing the *Zacapa*. More "information." At Quirigúa again. Barrios. The "schooner." A negro prophecy. On board another *gasolina*. Misery in the Gulf. At Puerto Cortés. Tela in sight. Speeches at the Custom House. We miss our steamer.

IT was one thing to reach Guatemala City and quite another to leave it. I wanted to catch the s.s. *Changuinola* at Tela on the 28th of March. Twice I had been in her to Honduras, and the doctor was an old friend of mine. The first thing to find out was if there had been any change in her arranged dates. For fruit boats run to a closer schedule than many purely passenger steamers. Passengers will keep, and bananas may get over-ripe in a few hours. I called on the Company's agents, and was told that our steamer would sail as appointed. Then arose the question as to how we could get from Barrios to Tela. The *Zacapa* sailed that night! There was no other boat for weeks. But there were schooners going. I did not then know that "schooners" were truly *gasolinas*, or my heart would have sunk lower than it did. How could I catch the *Zacapa*? The morning train had gone.

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What about a special? That was a desperate and expensive method, perhaps even more expensive than it looked. I was told I had to get Government permission to hire one. This meant many interviews and a waste of time. I do not say that it must also have meant a trifle here and a trifle there, but those who seek to hurry in Central America must at least oil a palm or two. I gave up the special idea and relapsed on the schooner of my mind, a decent little fore-and-aft rigged craft. I heard the hiss and ripple of the sea as she beat against the temperate North-East Trade. After all, it would not be so bad, and it gave us a day or two more in the city. To make sure I telegraphed to Dr. Macphail at Quirigúa and he telegraphed to Barrios for me. A wire from him said that the schooner *Underwriter* would sail on a date to give us three days in Tela. And in the meantime we could stay for another spell in the flowery paradise of Quirigúa.

Why should I go into these details? To warn the unwary that nothing which happens a few miles away except revolutions and earthquakes is of any interest to most people in Central America. I have said and repeated that they are courteous, kindly and hospitable. The merest stranger desires to serve you. So amiable clerks looked up tables of references which were out of date tables of irrelevance. What about our first delay in Guatemala? That

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was due to the highest authority who sent a telegram compact of inaccuracies. But time is of no value. When I saw the *Zacapa* was impossible I was told that there was another steamer in a fortnight to Jamaica. I could go there and catch a steamer homeward bound from Tela. That one steamer or one date was better than another or more desirable for any reason was absurd to them. They were amazed, and possibly crossed themselves in secret when I declared that I would get to Tela by March 27th, if I braved the dangers of the Gulfs of Amatique and Honduras in an Indian dug-out. Of course, Macphail was not like this. But how did I know that the information he got me from Puerto Barrios was correct? How, indeed? Is there a man in Central America who will risk a *real* on the skipper of a local steamer, schooner, or gasolina sailing when he says he will? Not one out of a lunatic asylum. So we spent a day or so in Guatemala, much of the time in the company of my friend Sawyer, Doña Clara and Mlle. Petit. Sawyer got me more information, but refused to guarantee its accuracy. He knew better. "Information" out there is like the sound of a fog-signal or siren in a fog at sea. When a big ship is run down in a fog I expect to find a reporter on my doorstep asking me to write a short article in about three minutes and a half on fogs. This is extremely easy. The rules for happy shipmasters

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to go by are simple. If a fog-signal sounds close to him he must not infer that its point of origin is close. If it sounds far off his certificate is in peril if he thinks it is really far off. If it sounds as though coming from one particular point of the compass it is highly dangerous to believe that it does not come from another, perhaps a directly opposite one. And finally, to make him thoroughly happy, he must not believe for an instant if he does not hear it at all that it has not been sounded properly. The traveller can apply proper variants of all this to information in Central America. He may not lose a certificate of competency, and it is foolish to lose temper, but it would not surprise me to learn that many have lost their reason. To do so is, perhaps, of no importance. What is the good of reason in the Lotos Land of Mañana? I do not intend this exposition to be bitter. It is, after all, merely natural history.

On the 21st of March we left the city and went to Quirigúa. This journey, being wholly in daylight, lacked the mystery of that taken in the opposite direction. But I saw in one long dry arroyo the most wonderful display of colour I had yet observed. The wide stream-bed was decorated for miles by great flowering trees, which were masses of violet, or scarlet, or orange or pure yellow, which recurred again and again in wonderful harmony or contrast, and, strangely enough, it seemed to me, no musician,

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that they were not to be painted, but might be translated in the mind of a master into tone colour and a definite pattern such as a great fugue of Bach. For what is in his fugues we know, and yet we do not know how he will answer and again reply and change in a magical kaleidoscope of sound the repeated and glorified theme. So here one saw thematic colour, and Nature played her great fugue on it, and changed and transformed and glorified it beyond expectation, surprise and delight. This was a daylight piece of music, but how much more wonderful it must be as the evening begins to fall and the river bed and banks and far hills are caught up and swept into the developed theme. I put this picture with that of the great sunset of La Union, which still glows in memory. It was well to have such memories to balance against the petty miseries that were to follow.

We left Quirigúa, as all leave it, with regret. The doctor there is as notable as one of the Maya monuments, and far more accessible. I was glad to learn that the two peons, one of them the "Man in Red," who had operated on each other with knives and machetes had gone back to work. We reached Barrios at dusk, and were met by a young employé of the United Fruit Company. Mr. Rayor, the temporary local Manager, inducted us into the empty flat of an official who was on holiday, and did everything in his power to make us comfortable.

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"From information received" he suggested that there was some possibility of the schooner *Underwriter* sailing in the morning. I gather that his experience rendered him incredulous, but as he promised to let us know as soon as the skipper had made up his mind I was perfectly content, and even slept peacefully. We were not disturbed by any such swift and wonderful cockroaches as had decorated the walls at La Union.

In the morning after breakfast we went to see Rayor, who sent to find when the boat sailed. The messenger returned in a few minutes to say that it left in half an hour. Somehow we all believed it. So N. rushed off to pack, and Rayor and I went to the wharf, where we met the skipper and a kind of supercargo. Yes, they were going at once. There was, however, a catch in it, a very serious one. They were only going to Cortés and Ceiba, and would not call at Tela! I could not suppress my anxiety, of which no doubt due advantage was taken. He agreed to land us in Tela for fifty dollars. I went down and looked at the boat. It made me fairly sick, not for myself, but for N. It was small, perhaps about thirty tons, dirty, and without any decent accommodation. There were some narrow, coffin-like berths in a cock-pit for'ard and a "cabin" about six feet by five with four like berths furnished with filthy bedding, which suggested every possible kind of "bug." Rayor suggested that we should wait for

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a boat on the following day. But neither he nor anyone else could guarantee that it would sail, and if it did not then we should be late. I discovered afterwards that if we had waited we could not have reached Tela in time. So I went back to help with the luggage and said not a word to N. about the boat. She accepted disasters well when they came, but in anticipation imagined them worse than the reality. Major, the big negro porter, duly encouraged me. "I 'm sorry you are goin' in this boat, sah. Very nasty boat, sah ! And sholy they 'll be fightin' at Cortés. Most likely they 'll fire on you, for you 'll get there in the dark, sah. And at Tela they 've killed a lot of white folk !"

This was a repetition of what we had heard even in Guatemala City, which was fuller of rumours than refugees. Ceiba was utterly destroyed, Fruit Company and all. Tela was drowned in blood and probably burnt. "You can't go to Tela ! There isn't such a place now." But very rarely indeed do facts come up to report. I disregarded what I was told and laughed at Major's dismal forebodings, which he sadly repeated to N. "Missey, they 'll shoot at you, for sho'!" She regarded the prospect with satisfaction. Some people like more excitement than is good for them. I have learnt to do with little. Now once more the Aduana came into action. The Puerto Barrios men ransack baggage as much when it leaves the country as when it comes into it,

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heaven only knows why. But at last everything was taken on board and stowed away, and we waited at the head of the wharf to catch the skipper on his return. He came at last. They would not sail till seven in the evening !

This man was an American. I had banked on that. But once more it was a case of the dyer's hand. In Massachusetts he might have remained a hustler. In these Americas he took on the colour of the country. And now what faith could any have that it would not be seven next morning, if, indeed, he went then ? None. And if he did leave was there any guarantee that he would get to Tela ? I remembered the *Colorado* in the Gulf of Fonseca. And so the hot day drifted by in anxiety till evening came and found us sitting on the verandah of the Norte Hotel, now managed by the Texan, Captain Grace, who kept this fonda as well as his hotel in Guatemala. He will probably make it habitable, for some Americans remain American. He, too, regretted we were to sail in the *Underwriter*, and gave us some bottles of coffee and milk, for which he refused to take any payment. These with an orange or two were all we took with us. Our next food was to be got at Puerto Cortés, if we ever reached it. And at last seven o'clock came. The "schooner" would sail at eight. And eight o'clock came. It would sail at nine. We went aboard at nine, and the boat got under way at a quarter to ten.

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It was dark long before we set foot in this craft, and the dim light of some poor lanterns did not discover to me what N. thought of all I had done for her. She said nothing, or so little that it was easy to guess. Without privacy, cleanliness or comfort for at least eighteen hours of misery, there was nothing for it but tears, rage, or silence. She chose the better part, and crawled into her dirty coffin berth without a word. The whole boat reeked of oil, petrol, bilge-water and negroes. The port side was lumbered up with our only boat, guaranteed to drown all who trusted to it in a sea-way. For some hours the crew, enlivened by aguardiente, sang monotonous and maddening songs. The berths were too narrow to pull up one's knees, too shallow to allow any to sit up. I spread a newspaper over my filthy pillow and smoked King Bees in silence. N. covered her pillow with a handkerchief and tried to rest. While we were in the land-locked Gulf of Amatique the sea was calm and the boat plugged away at a fair rate. But when we rounded Tres Puntos and came into the open Gulf of Honduras a strong north-easterly trade raised a sea in which she plunged heavily. Now the supercargo and another man came into the berth and crawled into the two lower bunks. Fortunately they were sober and quiet. That at least was good. And then the sobering crew slept in silence. After all, beastly as everything was, this was the last of it.

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To-morrow we should be in the Tela guest-house, where there were baths. And then the engines ceased firing. We lay and rolled. Yes, these are no more than minor adventures, mere discomforts. I had suffered things ten thousand times worse—hunger, thirst, vermin, and all the plagues that can afflict a penniless wanderer on the face of the earth. But if I was ever so much disturbed by these things as by this most accursed gasolina as she wallowed and made no way, then my memory fails me. Luckily the trouble was soon remedied, and we pitched heavily once more and shipped seas on our starboard side. Now the passengers for'ard of us responded to the motion. We heard them groaning in the agonies of sea-sickness. N. being a determined personality, who revealed depths of stoicism I had never suspected, bore it long, but at last succumbed to the effects of the smells of oil and petrol and a combined pitch and roll which might have affected an old seaman. She tried not to disturb me, and crawled outside to the oily wet deck and presently got soaked to the knees. But I had to help her. It was hard to get out of the bunks. They ran thwart-ships, and we had to lie with our heads to leeward. If we did not, bars and pipes that otherwise only bruised one's knees were jammed into one's back. There were now no lamps but those for'ard, so we had nothing but the light of the stars. Those were not comfortable hours. My only satisfaction lay in reflecting

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that I had been in even worse case on the California coast in 1885, when I came down from Crescent City to San Francisco in a pitch-black den, at the bottom of a ladder, which was about the size of our cabin in the *Underwriter* and contained two sick Chinamen and myself and no ventilation. On the whole, however, I thought our situation sufficiently unpleasing for a young woman taking her first big journey and for a confirmed crock. It is lucky that there is a kind of pleasure in endurance. Our prayer now was for Puerto Cortés and daylight. Cortés appeared to us now as a great and happy refuge ; there was a hotel there ; happiness itself resided in it. So, dirty, dishevelled and disgruntled, we came to it at last in the glaring morning sun that glittered painfully from still waters.

By now I was thoroughly aware that getting to Cortés did not mean that we should get away again at any definite date. This was not "knowledge," it was mere intuition. It was "borne in upon me," to use something like the language of the strange illogical logic of Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. But if the worst came to the worst we could get to Tela from Cortés by taking a train, a river boat, and another train. I had half a mind to leave the *Underwriter* and chance it, and probably should have done so if the "Hotel" had turned out to be the harbour of refuge we had imagined. The supercargo told us it was kept by a Frenchman

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and that we should get good coffee there. It is speaking with much restraint to say it was probably the worst we had tried to drink in Central America. The food, too, was uneatable. But the charges were magnificent. However, N. got a wash in a bedroom, and I got one in the public bar with a public towel. After this feast we sat outside to wait our departure. The supercargo came and collected my fare and broke it to me that the boat would probably not leave till night. Another night in that travelling den and gasworks was hot to be endured. And as I was making arrangements to have the baggage brought ashore the skipper came along and said he was going to sail at once. On his urgent advice we went on board again and sat silently in the sweltering heat. The captain then went on shore again. Presently the supercargo appeared and asked us where the captain was. He went away to look for him. Then the captain returned and asked where the supercargo was. He went to look for him. Presently we saw them coming together and our hopes rose. They passed the wharf without so much as turning an eye in our direction. Then they passed separately, and after a long interval hove in sight in company and came on board. The supercargo, however, seemed to have left something behind, perhaps a drink, and went ashore again. About this time I noticed an extremely young and not unattractive person sitting

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on the sill of the for'ard den, which was at once the wheelhouse and the captain's cabin. Perhaps she was the elderly captain's wife, perhaps not. From some puritanical but unprintably expressed remarks by an old English member of the crew I gathered that his legal wife was somewhere in the United States. These were the first rigid moral remarks I had heard in Central America. They made me feel that I was nearing home. But if the skipper would not sail for Tela without this *muchacha* I was now sufficiently immoral and desperate to have fetched her for him. For the sooner we got away the greater the chance of reaching our destination before dark if we did not break down at sea. When the supercargo came on board for the last time he seemed in a pessimistic mood, and dropped hints that no one knew what was happening or would happen at Tela. N. recalled Major's sadness at Barrios over our possible fate at the hands of the revolutionists. I said I would rather be killed at Tela than live in Cortés.

We left it at last. Never were folks so glad to leave it. Seamen have a picturesque phrase when "making a departure." They say, "We settled the land," or sometimes, "We sank the land" at such and such a time. If Cortés had sunk as deep as the fabled Atlantis we should have cared nothing and barely turned our heads. And if anything happened to this *gasolina* after she left Tela it would be a grim

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satisfaction. She disgraced the waters of Honduras. But the day was now splendid, the breeze lively and comparatively cool. The ocean sparkled like diamonds and was not too rough. Our spirits rose. We fancied we might even find the *Changuinola* waiting for us. Had they not told us in Barrios that she was due? Another few hours and then Paradise! If those who live in luxury and are never satisfied or content could but have a few hours in some gasolina they would find heaven itself close at hand when the hours passed.

On our starboard hand, as we made good headway, the coast looked forbidding enough. Where bananas are not grown the bush is what it was when the old piratical slave-dealing Hawkins sailed the deeps of Honduras and sold his wretched cargo to the Spaniards by force. The Caribbean is full of history, and most of it is not to our credit. We lied about the Spaniards as they lied about us. The land and sea reek of blood and piracy: the ghosts of ancient craft might still sail those waters, doomed for cruelty to such a fate as that of the *Flying Dutchman*. But now I kept one eye on our starboard bow, for we had passed Punto Sal with its rocky islets and Tela was somewhere ahead of us. And presently I saw, many miles away on a mountain slope, something which looked like a triangle bare of bush, and under it what seemed to be a white boat at anchor. Under that triangle as it is approached

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from the west lies Tela. The white boat was no boat but the glaring roof over the wharf at the seaward end of Tela jetty. And soon the wireless masts to the west of the port showed against the land. Surely now at last there was no doubt that we should catch the steamer for which we had hurried from Nicaragua, had crossed the wilds of Guatemala, and had endured with some fortitude the tribulations of the *Underwriter*.

Presently we came up with the jetty and, passing it, anchored off the Aduana. Our captain went on shore in the ramshackle boat with his papers to pay the dues. We saw a crowd on the verandah of the Custom House. How was the revolution going? We had been told that the "Reds" were out and the "Blues" were in. Was it not possible that we might not be able to land? Any disaster seemed likely enough. Why should they end? And still we waited. I was not happy till we were put out upon the beach and our baggage thrown out in a pile. There was no one to meet us, though a "wireless" from Barrios should have been sent. I left N. seated on a trunk as she listened to a speech by a revolutionary patriot, and went for assistance. At the office of the United Fruit Company I learnt that the authentic information I had received at Guatemala City, Quirigúa and Puerto Barrios was no more than Central American information. A strike in England, of which we had

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heard nothing, had delayed the *Changuinola*. After all the trouble we had taken to catch her she would not be there for another fortnight ! But Mr. Goodell, the manager, lent me his railroad car, to take our things to the guest-house and it was soon possible to get a bath and to send every stitch of one's clothes to the wash. Two days later we went on board the *Patuca* and sailed for Jamaica and England.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE FATE OF THE REPUBLICS

Republican lessons. Biology of politics. Bribery and corruption. "Reds" and "Blues." U.S.A. and Honduras. The Battle of Tela. Peace and authority. Raw politics. Patriotism. The Monroe Doctrine. American ministers. American movement south. Possibilities of Central America. Learning by travel.

IT may be that many of these chapters are too personal. There are people who seek positive information and despise what is indirect and merely indicative. But there are others who recognise that casual knowledge of this kind may have a value surpassing that which is looked for and gathered carefully. In this journey I sought no "copy" and intended no book. If both came so much the better. I went to Central America to see an old friend and escape the English winter. I found new friends and a hundred in the shade. These were the important things, but no one with eyes and ears can fail to find more in these republics. Nature and man alike are full of lessons, and I went to school again.

Many who think themselves interested in mankind care nothing for politics. I do not know how this is possible. But even biologists appear to scorn political nature, not seeing that social actions must in the end inevitably form part of the subject-matter

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of their science. To stand aside from politics is another thing. We are all political animals with some political instincts, but not everyone is qualified to enter the arena. I found Central America as good a school of crude politics in action as any could desire. Rough-and-ready politics throw a great, and sometimes a ghastly, light on the phenomena of our own country and illuminate the folly and wisdom of our statesmen. In England these cover, even from themselves, the motives which impel them. But politics are always the same wherever we go. There may be more idealists in one country than another, but at last we see that the idealist is but one who bandages his eyes and walks blindly, perhaps towards disaster, but in any case towards disillusionment. We have to take human beings as they are, or we can do nothing. It is possible in Central America to see naked interests at work, and the cool mind will observe their action with philosophic detachment. With stark and stripped humanity bribery and corruption are natural phenomena. If the English had had the sense to recognise as much the late war would not have lasted four years. Five or ten millions spent, or promised, would have kept Turkey neutral and saved hundreds of thousands of lives and hundreds of millions of money. But we are honourable fools. In the name of idealism we nearly achieved national death.

In an early chapter I dealt vaguely with the

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conditions of Honduras. It was not possible to be more than vague on a subject that was little known outside the capital. Honduras was then in the fit of political malaise which out there almost invariably ushers in a revolution. It was been said in medicine that the violence of inflammation is measurable by the loss of blood. According to Central America notions a good deal of blood was shed in Honduras after I left it. Later at Tegucigalpa two hundred were said to have been killed in one battle. But while we were first in Tela the "Reds" were in power, occupied their usual posts, drew their salaries, which are small, and made illicit profits, which are large, while the "Blues," a mixed party united only against the holders of office, had their thoughts firmly fixed upon that "reform" which promised them like powers and place.

When we were at last dumped on Tela beach their hopes had been fulfilled. I knew so much from Guatemalan papers, but only fully realised the fact when I heard a new enthusiastic office holder making a speech with a new heaven and a new earth in it to a crowd of bare-footed soldiers, new police and new Custom-house officers. They paid no attention to us or our baggage, but I saw that I could safely leave N. to listen to Spanish politics in solitude. They were too happy to make trouble, and when a man at last came to her he marked the luggage without looking at it and hastened back for the peroration. If he had looked for anything it

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might have been "guns." But those he might have confiscated were in my belt. A pistol of any kind is a temptation to all in a country of such active politics. It may be more useful than a vote. It may influence many votes. A levelled six-shooter often persuades a crowd of unarmed political opponents to vote "correctly." At one time, in at least one republic, the voter was given a paper to show that he had done so. Those found without it got a flogging.

In the hospital belonging to the United Fruit Company at Tela I found some fifty wounded men. It seems that we had missed a great deal by leaving the town before the actual local crisis. There was something grimly humorous about what occurred. It was also highly characteristic of other things than mere local politics at work. Mixed with the crude brutality too often seen here there is for ever something to laugh at. But what looked most laughable was truly more significant than the mere bloodshed. I did not know as I crossed the bridge over Tela River, then guarded by a keen-looking citizen with a couple of revolvers, that I was passing something like a new political line. When the "Blues" came down on Tela in strength, for a seaport naturally offers great opportunities to the holders of office, there were some American gunboats lying at anchor close in shore. I pretend to know nothing of the inner political side of the great Boston Company which grows bananas from Puerto Barrios

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south to Santa Marta in Columbia. But such a Company cannot protect itself in big emergencies. "Palm-oil" may do much, but it cannot calm the sea of revolution. Any great investment in a foreign country is "peaceful penetration," which may need other methods than those of peace to reap profits or bananas. It may be that the gunboats lay off Tela by accident. Perhaps the *Tacoma* was also anchored off Amapala by accident. In any case, American marines were sent on shore and formed a cordon about the Company's offices which lie west of Tela River. The leaders of the "Reds" and "Blues" were spoken to somewhat in the manner of a headmaster, without moral objection to fighting by his boys, who might say, "Fight, if you must, in the fives court, but if I catch you fighting elsewhere there will be trouble." The candidates for office were told that if they wanted to fight they must do it on the east side of the bridge. Otherwise—and that was all. Very obediently, and apparently without seeing the humour or real meaning of the situation, they retired across the stream and fought it out. But—did not the United States win? It may well be thought so. If one may put it so, *nuestro vecino del norte* has the bananas. Say what we will, this is the essence of the whole Central American situation. The United States is master of the cane.

Independent of such a conclusion these republics can teach other lessons, lessons many of our

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politicians are not ready to learn. Why is there not peace in Central America? Because there is neither subordination nor authority. The essence of social polity is live and let live. Not every nation has learnt it, perhaps not one. It is hard to be a “good European.” Yet some politicians believe that India with all its many races and savagely incompatible religions can rule itself. Advanced and civilised Europe (save the mark!) cannot do this, but India can. Idealists may reflect that when the Central American States broke from Spain in 1824 they joined in a federation and set up a constitution modelled on that of the United States. They had chances for permanent unity rarely offered to struggling nationalities, and were not only without enemies, but possessed in the north a neighbour bound to protect them from alien oppression. Yet now Central America, with its few millions and one mixed but dominant race with one dominant religion, is rarely at peace. And Europe and India have bigoted, hostile, and divided populations of about three hundred millions. If unbalanced enthusiasts spent some months in these republics they might come home with more level heads. Nations get the rulers they deserve and have worked for, and hasty idealism spells instant anarchy. Peace without authority is still a dream, and I shall disbelieve this when idealists cease to tear each other’s hair and philanthropists dwell together in harmony.

I am no politician. To be one means possessing

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the power to endure and conciliate every fool who can influence more fools than himself. But politicians are necessary. The only way to look on them with any patience is to regard them with a biological eye. Then Parliament becomes a rude social organ seeking to adapt the fluid organic state to its changing environment. Two parties, or three parties, are always right and always wrong. Varying circumstances make one less wrong, and perhaps more right, than another. The phenomena of Central America can be observed at Westminster : the very diseases of these republics can be found in England, Great Britain, the Empire and, indeed, in the whole world. The politicians fight first for themselves and secondly for the country in which they live, or which pays them with a sense of power. They mix their opinions with their interests and acquire an honourable faith in the results. But parties rose first out of mere self-protection or for acquisition. For them their interests were supreme. It was only later that they moralised and rationalised them. In Central America we see the early raw biology of politics. Few politicians can afford to abuse its statesmen. It might teach and humble many to observe the facts out there, and to note that parliaments rarely become unanimous in patriotism till they are threatened not only with a temporary but with a permanent deprivation of their office, powers, and privileges. They may do good work, but on a

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final analysis it is their interests that move them. There are some who would prefer power under a conqueror to a humbler position in an autonomous state.

What, then, *is* patriotism in Central America? I hesitate a little to say so, but in its essence it is nothing but fear that these countries, or the great mass of the docile and uninstructed who compose them, may be lost to the competing gangs which fight to possess them as feeding grounds, and alternately batten on them or starve and conspire in outer darkness. This is not to say that there are no honourable and honest men. I have noted before that the one man in Guatemala who is universally regarded as such lost office on account of his virtues, and cannot regain it without disgraceful compromise. For the most part power is pursued for the material results. I do not say that necessary work is always neglected. If a President becomes rich and yet manages to put the lighting and paving of his city into fair condition he is a good President. Some would turn every *real* available into Bonds to Bearer and keep them safely in New York, London or Paris. While they are in power their parasites, if well fed, call them great men. They fall and are hooted at: their greatness lay merely in their ability to recognise that other men are also greedy. They forget this at last, and their end is sure.

These republics have been independent since they broke loose from Spain. Terribly as they have

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misused their freedom, they are at least no longer the milch-cows of a Mother State. They are better off : they have rare periods of decent rule and are not drained of blood through every pore. But they have no real sense of race, and without this sole capacity to form a nation they adopted a scheme of government only too severely tried in the United States, which is still permeated with corruption. Having no true feeling of solidarity, the leaders of the Anti-Spanish Movement quarrelled among themselves. Intense and selfish "separatism" destroyed any real "Unionista" policy. The people, as incapable of self-rule as their rulers, looked on and suffered and were exploited. The history of a country is not unlike the history of a machine. When it is newly invented it loses half its energy in friction. As time goes on the machine is improved and energy saved. As it wears out the loss of power again increases. Given full time, it may be imagined that these countries would learn to govern themselves on something like a democratic basis, even on the lines of a conservative democracy which scorned the notion of equal rights. But time is lacking, and the world, especially the business world, which is for ever rendered uneasy by increase of capital seeking outlets, looks to them to set their houses in order and to do it in haste, which is impossible. World politics and the Monroe Doctrine, which is the doctrine of areas of influence transliterated,

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have handed their destinies to the United States. When Monroe and Canning made their move against Spain they gave the United States more than they reckoned on. Few nations move north, but the south seems always open, and in America men and money move towards the Equator. An American minister told a friend of mine : “ *I rule this State.*” It was highly indiscreet in a diplomatist, but it had much truth in it. In the Gulf of Fonseca did I not see the battleship *Tacoma* at anchor outside Amapala ? There is an American man-of-war at Corinto : marines are permanently stationed in the Nicaraguan capital : in Salvador an American official “ supervises ” the Customs with tact and discretion but also with determination. When troops are moved towards any frontier some American minister asks questions which are in essence advice and orders.

What, then, is the result of this great natural movement south ? Does it inspire wisdom and give rise to a national and patriotic desire to avoid what looks inevitable unless methods are changed ? I should say it does nothing of the sort. It does but increase the anxiety of the Republican ruling parties to make hay while the sun shines. They hasten to gather their unholy crop as the storm clouds gather in the north. It is true that there is still the great dam of Mexico between them and the North American flood. But for other world factors which influence the United States Mexico would by now

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have been set in order. The Americans bear outrages on their citizens with impatience. If they endured with unseemly humility the sinking of the *Lusitania*, it must be remembered that the average ignorant American despises Europe, and in his ignorance could not see how deeply his interests were involved. As regards Mexico the Americans have every excuse for war. But to be involved in an interminable guerilla warfare in a difficult country with Japan scowling on their flank might be disastrous. But whether Mexico is reduced to order by its present President or by an outside force, it must in the end become an appanage of the United States. Its independence will be the independence of Cuba. On the Cuban port of Guantanamo an American fleet is based. I saw it returning there after manœuvres. When Mexico yields to force and fate the time of Central America will come. The Republics will make no real resistance. They cannot. Countries with their politics in the condition in which Europe once wallowed, and now threatens to wallow once more, cannot compete in war or commerce with a great nation in which the ruling classes have at least the countenance of the more energetic part of the population. The fatal lesion in the Central American States lies in the fact that the rulers, the few who would serve, and the many who would bleed, their poor and illiterate fellow-citizens, have

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none to back them in any crisis. And it must be owned that the earthquake wave which originated in the Russian revolution has had some effect even here. The *artezanos*, or skilled workers of the towns, are more than touched with Communism.

It is a great pity that a prosperous and independent future can hardly be predicted for these little republics on the world's earthquake line. They are fertile and capable of a greater fertility. They possess the strangest monuments of the past, and might build others for the future. The beauty of the country is a wonder : the people, whether of pure Spanish blood or those in whose veins it runs mingled with that of the Indians, are, when treated with courtesy, charming, hospitable and helpful. The climate may have its extremes, but no extreme is insupportable, and for a great part of the year it is wholly delightful. With a little more regard for science the unhealthier parts can be made places of happy resort. The vegetation is marvellous : the timber magnificent and valuable. And everywhere there may be untold mineral wealth. Many places do but await peace for it to bring true prosperity. Whatever one's expectations on going to Central America, no one who has seen more than its mere coastline will leave it without regret.

This is a book without pretensions to authority. I am never sure that I am right, even when most

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positive. If it is impossible to write with complete accuracy of any country, even our own, however long we stay in it, and this is proved by the foolish books people print on their own places of birth, it is *a fortiori* unlikely that the casual observer can always be correct in his judgments. If we reflect on books which might have been called *Five Seconds in the United States*, *An Hour in India*, or *Round the World in Forty Minutes*, and observe the quaint certainty of their authors that heaven inspired them to solve, let us say, the questions as to the negro in the United States, the Englishman in India, or the Japanese in the Pacific, the humorous results might give the stoutest journalist qualms. But it is a fine question whether experience in travel is, after all, any help if it does not teach us toleration and that what idealists rashly call prejudices may be well founded. Travel may divest us of some prejudices, reinforce others and endow us with new ones. I lived and worked in Australia for more than two years, in the United States for three, and have some little knowledge of South Africa and many other places. Though I was then younger, I learnt that the more I saw the less I was certain of, and that any tale is good till the opposing story is told. One came down to "brass tacks," to things done, things seen, and learnt to view even sight and memory with caution. I know that I acquired prejudices. I lived for a while in the Southern States,

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and learnt to feel a little of the Black Shadow there that makes the blood run cold for so many. I saw the Chinese in California and British Columbia, and even worked near one of the first Japanese in that country. Yes, travellers, who are not always travelling, do acquire prejudices. But those who declaim against them would do better to inquire how they arose than to lift some absurd standard of idealism in an unideal world which has to deal with men as they are. I say so much because I have, perhaps, here palliated the follies, vices, and political methods of Central America. If I would not "throw the costliest robes" over the failures of men, I can at least discern vaguely how they came to fail. How possible it would be to wander in Central America with some moral flag held on high for which not a soul is ready! How possible it is to declare that the whole ends and aims of *nuestro vecino del norte*, the United States, are as pure of self-seeking as those of St. Francis. This has been done and will be done again. I am on the whole content to observe, with whatever margin of error, the people there as men working, perhaps lawlessly in the human sense, but still under inexorable law. The truth is that I liked them, and have perhaps no more liking for law in general than Dr. Johnson and Kit Smart had for clean linen. The Spanish are a likeable people. Many Indians are charming, though I have met callous brutes. The mixed blood

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of the Five Republics is, after all, a kindly stream. It may rage at times in torrents, the devil may emerge, but I was never more conscious of the devil in others than the devil in myself. I have flung stones, it is true, but one does not really break windows in Central America. They are already shattered : all secrets are the secret of Polichinelle. I hear that tons of books have been written taking away the last shred of decent cover from Central American impropriety. I can imagine the people smiling. What does it matter ?

If, however, I have scarcely consulted more than a map or two, it may be that my preparation was none the worse. To sit with Mexicans, Choctaws and Chickasaws about a mesquite camp-fire : to hear from one dead great man perpetual stories of the mixed blood and bloody politics of South America : to listen at times to the vivid talk of him whom I once called "our only hidalgo," who knows his Spanish and his Spaniard, whether a Castilian, a *gachupino*, or the poorest gaucho or mestizo of the pampa, may be a fairer education than a shelf of books. Let me make all the mistakes possible and be corrected with a *cordonazo*, but after every error is allowed for and repented of, someone of those who read may go and look for himself. He will not regret the pilgrimage when it is done, though he may curse upon the way. *Vaya usted con Dios, amigo !*

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